*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

March 15 - 20

Mark’s Gospel

**Monday, March 15 Mark 13:1-4**

*“These great buildings will be completely demolished”*

 As Jesus departs the temple, the disciples are overawed by its magnificence. The temple also gave the Jews a sense of security because it was the place where God lived. How could God ever abandon this beautiful house or allow it to be destroyed? When Jesus tells them to look at the buildings, he wants them so see with perception, to see through all the glitzy religiosity. What they do not yet see is the temple’s barrenness. What they do not yet know is that this temple’s rulers are preparing to exert all their power to destroy Jesus and that they will later set their sights on destroying his disciples. Jesus prophecies the complete destruction of the temple, for it has become spiritually obsolete.

 Talk of the temple’s destruction sets off alarm bells in their heads. They clearly connect the temple’s destruction to the end time, for they still see it as the center of their narrow universe. Peter, James, John and Andrew want to know exactly when this will occur and what is *the* sign so that they can prepare themselves for the catastrophe and perhaps escape its terrors.

*When your church no longer produces fruit, Lord, it has become obsolete. Amen.*

**Tuesday, March 16 Mark 13:5-8**

*“Don’t let anyone mislead you”*

 Having predicted the destruction of the temple, Jesus now gives his disciples clues about what will happen, leading up to its demise. The central theme is that they should not be deceived by events or by false prophets. These things must happen before the end comes, but they do not predict the end. Terrible events will occur, but these events should not cause undue dread or hysteria or distract them from their calling.

 The disciples will need spiritual wisdom to be able to unmask the deceivers who claim to represent Jesus and to know when the end will come. Jesus also warns about international commotions and natural disasters who some claim indicate the end. These also should not cause excessive alarm for earthquakes, warfare, and famines are always happening somewhere. What Jesus calls “the beginning of birth pains” includes what will happen to him and covers an unspecified period of time during which Jesus’ disciples bear witness, suffer persecution, and stand in danger of deception.

*Give us wisdom, Lord, so we will not be deceived. Amen.*

**Wednesday, March 17 Mark 13:9-13**

*“Don’t let persecution break your resolve”*

 Jesus gives these warnings so that his disciples will not be overwhelmed but able to respond appropriately when suffering comes their way. While the disasters described in 13:5-8 impact everyone living in areas of earthquakes, war and famine, the persecutions sketched in 13:9-13 specifically target Christians because they are Christians. Suffering and hatred come to Christ’s followers because they preach the gospel faithfully. They are not signs of the end.

 In the midst of this bleak landscape of wars, starvation, atrocities, earthquakes, persecution, and treachery, the one bright light is God’s intention to get the word of the gospel out to all. That “the good news must first be preached to the whole world” does not mean, as some have preached, that the sooner the gospel is preached, the sooner the end will come. There is nothing humans can do to hasten the end. Its timing depends entirely on God. Rather, what Jesus is saying is that, in spite of all these obstacles, the gospel *will* be preached around the world.

*May your gospel continue to spread, Lord, in spite of barriers. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

March 15 - 20

Mark’s Gospel

**Thursday, March 18 Mark 13:14-23**

*“Warnings about war in Judea and deceivers”*

 The warnings in these verses apply specifically to the first and second generation of Jesus’ disciples, who will witness the war in Judea that will result in the destruction of the temple. After all, the commands to flee Judea and to take with you garments and valuable, and the statement to hope it’s not winter or that one is not pregnant, have no purpose if Jesus is speaking of the end of the world. Rather, the cue to take flight comes when a desecration takes place in the temple, a desecration that Mark’s readers would recognize.

 Jesus does not lament here over the temple’s destruction, but he does express compassion for those caught in the catastrophe and he counsels flight away from the temple for it will not be a place of safety. These verses about the war in Judea conclude with another warning about deceivers. False prophets will arise who will exploit the catastrophe for their own ends and add to the miseries of the people. They will champion various saviors, but Jesus Christ is the only Savior and he is in heaven with the Father.

*You are our only Savior, Lord; there is no other. Amen.*

**Friday, March 19 Mark 13:24-27**

*“The Son of Man coming on the clouds”*

 The hope of Jesus’ coming enables Christians to endure affliction, but Jesus gives no precise timetable about how long it will take for the end to come after the temple’s destruction. Two things are clear: The end of the temple must happen before the end of time, but it does not denote the end. Jesus is silent about what might lie between the two events. He simply says, “But in those days, following that distress.”

 How long following that distress? Jesus does not say, and he does not want his followers to attempt to nail down a specific chronology of end-time events. He expects his disciples to be ready for anything anytime. Busying oneself with calculations about dates is thus a fruitless exercise that can only distract from the mission that God has called the church to, which is to preach the gospel. God does not require a studious deciphering of international threats and natural disasters but spiritual vigilance that makes one ready for Christ’s return whenever he comes.

*While awaiting your return, Lord, we faithfully share the gospel. Amen.*

**Saturday, March 20 Mark 13:28-37**

 *“Stay alert!”*

 *The lesson from the fig tree (13:28-31).* The fig tree parable and the statement that all these things will come upon this generation is a reference to the woes preceding the destruction of the temple (13:5-23). One can see evidence of the coming destruction of Jerusalem as surely as one can tell that a budding fig tree means summer is near.

 *The unknown time of the end (13:32).* Jesus affirms that the time of the end is hidden from all humans, the angels in heaven, and even the Son. Nothing can be clearer.

 *The parable of the doorkeeper (13:33-37).* This parable applies to the coming of the Son of Man. Its key element is that the servants have no advance warning when the master of the house will return. The doorkeeper must keep alert throughout the watches of the night. He must endure the test of absence and uncertainty. While we await the Master’s return we are to work faithfully because the Master will return. While we await the Master’s return we are to work with assurance because it is the Master who returns.

*You are the One returning, Lord, so we live with assurance that all will be well. Amen.*