

The Peril of Christlessness

Mark 13.1-13

In Manila Bay in the Philippines, there is a small tadpole-shaped island called Corregidor. It is a gold mine of World War II history – because from that island Douglas MacArthur commanded the US Armed Forces in the Far East. MacArthur loved the Philippines. He was first stationed there in 1922 – 19 years before World War II broke out. He was best friends with President Manuel Quezon, and actually commanded the Filipino army for a time after his retirement from the American army.

He was a trusted hero when the Japanese invaded . . . but heroism was not enough on that occasion. The Japanese swiftly overran the ill-equipped Filipino and American defence, and on 12 March 1941, by order of the American President Roosevelt, MacArthur was evacuated from his beloved Philippines to Australia.

On the Corregidor beach from which MacArthur departed, there stands a monument today inscribed with his famous promise: “I shall return”. (He actually first made that promise from a small South Australian outback town named Terowie whilst waiting to change trains.)

After MacArthur left, the Philippines fell to the Japanese. Two years later, when he returned, the Philippines were liberated.

Today we begin a new series of messages from Mark – a series about the return of Jesus Christ. Unlike MacArthur, Jesus did not flee the battle field. His ascension was not an evacuation, it was a strategic advantage. Nevertheless, our world continues to be embroiled in a spiritual warfare that daily leaves a host of casualties in its wake. Wherever Christ is absent, life is bad. Our only hope is in Christ’s presence – and He will be present over the entire earth when He returns – from that time forward life could never be better.

The sermon in a sentence comes from a t-shirt I saw. Sermon in a Sentence: No Christ, no peace; know Christ, know peace.

[Pray]

In the gospel of Mark, we see that Jesus is the Surprising Servant. Why surprising? Because He came to this earth to serve and to give His life a ransom for many, even though He is the eternal God and the universal King. In short, He should have been receiving service, not giving it.

Recently, we have been considering the great services of Jesus. There are four. His crucifixion, whereby He atoned for sin once for all. His resurrection, whereby He secured our hope for eternal life. His ascension, whereby He intercedes before the throne of God the Father. And now we come to the fourth, His return. The Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

Whenever I see injustice in the streets; whenever I hear of young people despairing and contemplating suicide; whenever I read of children dying in earthquakes and tsunamis and bombings and overturned boats . . . I think ‘even so, come, Lord Jesus’.

Our world is broken beyond repair. Come, Lord Jesus, and make it new.

Over the next few weeks, we will explore the timing, the nature and the outcome of Christ's second coming – as described in Mark 13. Where there is no Christ, there is no peace. Where people know Christ, they always and necessarily know peace.

The story begins at the Jerusalem temple where Jesus has just been rejected as Saviour, King and Lord. The motion towards Christ's return begins like MacArthur's – with the appearance of total defeat. Notice from this text three ways peace is broken by Christlessness.

1. The Holy Splendour is Departed (Mark 13.1-2)

Mark 13:1-2 (NKJV)

¹Then as **He went out of the temple**, one of His disciples said to Him, "Teacher, see what manner of stones and what buildings *are here!*" ²And Jesus answered and said to him, "**Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone shall be left upon another, that shall not be thrown down.**"

Let's begin by listening to the disciples. Can you hear the excitement in their voice: 'see what manner of stones and what buildings!?' They are riding on an emotional high. Just two days earlier, they had marched with Jesus into Jerusalem to the shouts of 'Hosanna, blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord' (Palm Sunday). No doubt, as they now gaze on this magnificent temple, they are thinking, 'this will be ours; victory is at hand'.

The temple they are admiring is actually the second Jerusalem temple – a replacement for the first temple which was built almost a thousand years earlier by Solomon. This new temple was called Herod's Temple – an appropriate name because King Herod actually built it for his own fame.

Yet Herod did not build this temple from scratch. It was already there – albeit small and humble – first rebuilt by Zerubbabel in 520 BC (after the 70 year exile ended). Herod took that aging temple and greatly enlarged it with a massive construction project that started in 20 BC lasted more than 46 years (John 2.20).

John MacArthur describes Herod's temple for us: It "was one of the most impressive structures in the world, made of massive blocks of stone bedecked with gold ornamentation. Some of the stones in the temple complex measured 40x12x12 ft. and were expertly quarried to fit perfectly against one another. The temple buildings were made of gleaming white marble, and the whole eastern wall of the large main structure was covered with gold plates that reflected the morning sun, making a spectacle that was visible for miles."¹

You are probably familiar with the ruins of the Western Wall, more commonly called the Wailing Wall. It was not actually part of the temple. It was merely a retaining wall for the temple complex. Yet even to our modern eyes some 2000 years after the temple was destroyed, it is impressive.

¹MacArthur, J. J. (1997, c1997). *The MacArthur Study Bible* (electronic ed.) (Mt 24:1). Nashville: Word Pub.

Can you imagine the wide-eyed wonder of the disciples as they direct Jesus' attention to these grand buildings? If they had had digital cameras, they would have been snapping a mile a minute, like any other gobsmacked tourist.

As an aside, I recently read in the paper that tourism today is more about man-made wonders than God-made wonders. It used to be that people chose their holiday destinations according to seeing something in nature – whether wildlife or mountains or oceans.

But now most people choose their destinations on the basis of something man has created. It seems people are more interested in Manhattan than the Grand Canyon; in The Tower of London than the Swiss Alps; in the Opera House than the Great Barrier Reef.

I wonder why it is that people are becoming less interested in the marvels of God's creation? Perhaps it is because more and more people reject the idea that God exists. In the census data released this week, it was revealed that 22.3% of Australians identify themselves as atheists – one of the fastest growing religions. In fact, at the present rate, atheism will be the largest single religion in Australia by the next census, overtaking Roman Catholicism.

The Bible tells us that the 'heavens declare the glory of God'. We must be careful, then, to marvel most at what God makes, rather than at what man makes. This applies not just to tourist attractions, but even more so to churches. A beautiful church building is something man makes. A congregation strong in truth, faith and love is something God makes. Never think that God is limited in what He can do at Cornerstone Baptist because we are without a man made building.

Here we have the disciples drooling over the Temple of God while the God of the Temple is walking right beside them. A bit ironic . . . yet we too are susceptible to admiring man's handiwork whilst ignoring God's.

Now look at the opening words of Mark 13. 'He went out of the temple'. At first glance, these words seem to be descriptive. Jesus left the temple and walked two kilometres outside the walls of Jerusalem to the top of the Mount of Olives (so named because there are olive groves on its slopes even to this day – the Garden of Gethsemane is at its base).

But on closer consideration, this little phrase is saying much more than Jesus moved from point A to point B. It is declaring the awful judgement of God.

To put it a more sobering way, what we are told here is that God left His house. The glory departed. The holy splendour is departed.

This is the third and ultimate occurrence recorded in the Bible when God left His house. The other two occasions are in the Old Testament. All three are devastating.

The first time the glory of God departed was in the days of the Judges (about 1050 BC) when the house of God was the Tabernacle. Israel had only been in the Promised Land a short while when she started to drift from her obedience to God. Even the priests – Hophni and Phineas – were contemptible towards God – extorting the people.

So when the Philistines came out to battle against Israel, God did not protect His unbelieving people. Hophni and Phineas were killed, along with many others, and the Ark of the Covenant was captured.

Upon hearing the news, Phineas' dad, Eli, fell over backwards dead, and his wife, who was expecting a baby, went into labour. The labour was hard, and she lay dying from complications. But her greatest sorrow was over the Ark of God.

1 Samuel 4:21-22 (NKJV)

²¹Then she named the child Ichabod, saying, "**The glory has departed** from Israel!" because the ark of God had been captured and because of her father-in-law and her husband. ²²And she said, "**The glory has departed** from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured."

In our irreverent society, we have little regard for the Where of God. Is God here? Or has God departed?

Phineas' wife understood that if God departs, it is a fate worse than death. No Christ, no peace.

The second occurrence in the Old Testament is found in Ezekiel, and relates to the second house – Solomon's temple, which replaced the Tabernacle.

Ezekiel 10:18 (NKJV)

¹⁸Then **the glory of the LORD departed** from the threshold of the temple and stood over the cherubim.

Here is described the departure of God's glory before disobedient and disbelieving Judah is sent into exile in Babylon (590 BC). Immediately thereafter, Solomon's temple was totally destroyed by the Babylonians.

Now we come to the third and final occurrence which is stated in the subject of our text (AD 30). In the words of John's gospel, Jesus came unto His own, but His own received Him not. Therefore, Jesus departs from the third house – Herod's Temple. The glory departs. Ichabod is divinely written over it. Yet all His disciples can think about is posing for happy snaps in front of the temple He has just forsaken.

In AD 70, the Roman general Titus tore that house down . . . and it lies in ruins to this day.

There is no shattering of peace more severe or more profound than when holy splendour departs. No Christ, no peace.

We should be fearful of Christ departing. I think of the messages Christ gave to John to deliver to the seven churches in Revelation. Hear the warning Christ gave to the church at Ephesus:

Revelation 2:4-5 (NKJV)

⁴Nevertheless I have *this* against you, that **you have left your first love**. ⁵Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, **or else I will** come to you quickly and **remove your lampstand** from its place—unless you repent.

What do you think would be Christ's assessment of Cornerstone Baptist Church? Of you? Of me? Have we left our first love? Have we departed from a vibrant, undivided love for God? Is the flame of our holy affection burning bright?

Do we need to repent, lest our lampstand be removed? Lest His glory depart from this church. Lest Ichabod be written over our entry way?

Beware. Inside the Temple on the day Christ departed were self-satisfied Pharisees and scribes and priests – religious and theologically astute. Yet they did not know their peril. No Christ, no peace. Know Christ, know peace.

The first way peace is broken is because the holy splendour departs. The second way is because:

2. The Holy Serenity is Destroyed (Mark 13.3-8)

Jesus' terse message that the Temple would be destroyed contradicted the expectations of the disciples. They thought this was kingdom week, not passion week. That Jesus would be enthroned, not impaled on a cross.

Peter, Andrew, James and John pull Jesus aside and ask Him about the kingdom:

Mark 13:3-4 (NKJV)

³ Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked Him privately, ⁴ "Tell us, **when will these things be**? And **what will be the sign** when all these things will be fulfilled?"

They have two questions: when will this happen and how will we know. Jesus answers the questions in reverse order.

The signs are going to be both nonspecific and specific. There are two nonspecific signs – I say nonspecific because these have nothing to do with the 'when' of Christ's coming, only the 'why' of Christ's coming. Because these horrors are true, we need Christ to return.

The first nonspecific sign is that holy serenity is destroyed.

Think for a moment about peace. What is peace? In the Hebrew, peace is *shalom*. This word means *wholeness*. Therefore, in the biblical sense, peace means much more than merely the absence of conflict.

England and the United States fought two wars against each other – the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812. When were the two countries at peace? When they signed a truce and stopped shooting at each other? Or when they became allies and best friends from World War I onward?

Shalom means the later. *Shalom* is holy serenity. It is wholeness in the atmosphere, which means it never rains too much nor dries out too much. It is wholeness in nature, which means a child can reach his hand in a cobra's hole and not be bitten (Isaiah 11.8). It is wholeness in humanity, which means war is forgotten and love is everywhere (Isaiah 2.4).

Today we do not have *shalom*. And Jesus says this is a nonspecific sign that we need Him to return. Listen to how Jesus answers the question.

Mark 13:5-8 (NKJV)

⁵ And Jesus, answering them, began to say: *“Take heed that no one deceives you. ⁶ For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am He,’ and will deceive many. ⁷ But when you hear of wars and rumours of wars, do not be troubled; for such things must happen, but the end is not yet. ⁸ For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be earthquakes in various places, and there will be famines and troubles. These are the beginnings of sorrows.*

As long as there are earthquakes, famines and wars, there is no Christ. This week’s news headlines declare with certainty that Jesus has not yet returned – Victoria had an earthquake, and Afghanistan is still at war.

But rather than despairing at these disasters, we should be motivated to yearn for Christ’s second coming. When He comes, there will be peace – but only for those who know Christ.

Earlier I quoted from John 1.11 – ‘He came unto His own, but His own received Him not’. Now I want to finish the quote from John 1.12 – ‘but as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.’

Do you believe? Have you received?

Then look to that blessed hope. The glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ (Titus 2.13).

Do not be shaken when disaster strikes. It is the natural consequence of sin – a nonspecific sign. The holy serenity is destroyed. There is no wholeness in the atmosphere. It is imbalanced by sin, which is the explanation for devastating storms. There is no wholeness in the earth. It is imbalanced by sin, which is the explanation for earthquakes. There is no wholeness in nature. It is imbalanced by sin, which is the explanation for shark attacks and spider bites. There is no wholeness in humanity. It is imbalanced by sin, which is the explanation for arguments and violence.

For now the holy serenity is destroyed . . . but it won’t be this way forever. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

The first way peace is shattered is because the holy splendour departs. The second is because the holy serenity is destroyed. The third is because:

3. The Holy Sensibility is Denied (Mark 13.9-13)

What must Christ do to be believed? The truth is that nothing more can be done than what has already been done. He rose from the dead! What more could we ask for?

After His ascension into heaven, thousands of people began to believe. The church was born on Pentecost, and it rapidly spread around the world.

Yet for all its successes, the church suffered. Many of the religious and political leaders refused to submit to Christ and became militant against anyone who dared to believe. Time after time, Christians were hauled before tribunals and given a severe choice: recant or perish. Time after time, Christians died as martyrs.

The rabid hatred against the church – a hatred that is active even to this day – is at its depths illogical. What crime did Jesus commit? What threat is a belief system rooted in sacrificial love? Why is hope and joy and peace so offensive?

Holy sensibility is denied. This, too, is a nonspecific sign – the second one. Until Christ comes, the gospel will be not only rejected, but forcibly suppressed . . . if suppression were even possible.

Mark 13:9-13 (NKJV)

⁹“But watch out for yourselves, for they will deliver you up to councils, and you will be beaten in the synagogues. You will be brought before rulers and kings for My sake, for a testimony to them. ¹⁰ And the gospel must first be preached to all the nations. ¹¹ But when they arrest you and deliver you up, do not worry beforehand, or premeditate what you will speak. But whatever is given you in that hour, speak that; for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit. ¹² Now brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. ¹³ And you will be hated by all for My name’s sake. But he who endures to the end shall be saved.

Yet even in this evil, God achieves His good purpose. The kingship of Jesus is declared before rulers and kings . . . and, indeed, all the nations on the earth. Let it be known so that men are without excuse: Our God reigns.

I want you to look again at verse 13. Note that Jesus does not say, ‘you might be hated’ or ‘some of you will be hated’. He says you will be hated. Paul repeats this in 2 Timothy 3:12 (NKJV)

¹²Yes, and **all** who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus **will suffer persecution**.

Suffering is the true believer’s lot. So let me challenge you, as Paul said to Timothy,

2 Timothy 1:8-9 (NKJV)

⁸Therefore **do not be ashamed** of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God, ⁹ who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began,

2 Timothy 1:12 (NKJV)

¹²For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day.

Do you know what Day that is? It is the Day of Christ’s return. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

We have seen that where there is no Christ, there is no peace. Peace has been shattered by holy splendor departing, by holy serenity being destroyed, and by holy sensibility being denied.

But we are not without hope. Christ is coming again.

Do you know Him? If so, you will know peace today in your heart . . . and some day, when He returns, you will know peace in your eternal experience of the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus.