Message for THE LORD’S DAY MORNING, September 1, 2019
Christian Hope Church of Christ, Plymouth, North Carolina
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Message 63 in “Making A Difference” Sermon Series from the Gospel of Mark

“Dark Days On The Horizon”
Mark 13:14-23 (NKJV)

For these past twenty months we have been following the Life of Christ as recorded in the Gospel of Mark. And I don’t know about you, but I am thoroughly enjoying this series. When you do an in-depth study of any of the Gospels like we are doing in this series its as though we are walking side by side with Christ as He performs His miracles and sitting with the multitudes as He teaches us the great truths about the kingdom of heaven.

All along our journey we have seen the incredible difference Jesus made in the lives of those who believed in Him and trusted Him. Jesus is now just three days away from His crucifixion and He has much to say to His disciples about the future. He is preparing His disciples for the life they will live after He has completed His mission of redemption and returns to His heavenly Father.

As we open our Bibles once again to Mark chapter thirteen, we are looking at what is commonly known as “The Olivet Discourse.” It is called that because Jesus spoke these words to His disciples on the Mount of Olives which was in plain sight of Golgotha’s Hill where Christ would die on the cross.

Let’s pick up the record right where we left off last Lord’s Day, beginning with verse 14 and reading through verse 23.

MARK 13:14-23 (NKJV)

14 “So when you see the ‘abomination of desolation,’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it ought not” (let the reader understand), “then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.
15 Let him who is on the housetop not go down into the house, nor enter to take anything out of his house.
16 And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes.
17 But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days!
And pray that your flight may not be in winter.

For in those days there will be tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the creation which God created until this time, nor ever shall be.

And unless the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect’s sake, whom He chose, He shortened the days.

Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or, ‘Look, He is there!’ do not believe it.

For false christs and false prophets will rise and show signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.

But take heed; see, I have told you all things beforehand.

INTRODUCTION

There have been many “dark days” throughout the history of this cursed and fallen world.

- There were those “dark days” in the 14th Century when over 50 million people in Europe died of the Bubonic plague.

- There were also those “dark days” between the 12th and 18th Centuries known as “The Inquisition” when hundreds of thousands were burned at the stake for refusing to follow the unholy doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church.

- There were the “dark days” between 1914-1918 when the United States, along with most of the European nations were embroiled in World War I. Over 65 million lost their lives in that awful war. In 1939, just twenty-one years after the end of World War I, came World War II. And during the six years of that war over 72 million people died. Those were certainly some of the darkest days in history.

The period of “The Great Depression” from 1929-1939 were also some very dark days as hundreds of thousands of families lost everything they owned and many mothers even sold their own children to survive.

And let’s not forget those dark, dark days of The Holocaust when Adolph Hitler and his NAZI regime exterminated the lives of nearly 6 million Jews.
The assassination of Presidents Lincoln and Kennedy......
The bombing of Pearl Harbor.......the Viet Nam War......
The explosion of the Space Shuttle Challenger.......the genocide of over 800,000 Rwandan refugees.......the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. All of these are sobering reminders that this world has seen some very dark days.

But as awful and horrific as these days were, Jesus is revealing to us in today's scripture that the world's “darkest days” are still on the horizon. In this passage Jesus takes us to a period of time still in the future known as “The Great Tribulation” and what Jesus describes for us here will make all other dark days in history pale by comparison.

As we go back and take a closer look at what Jesus is saying in these verses we are going to focus our attention on three specific warnings Jesus gives His disciples.

First of all.......

I. Jesus Gives A WARNING OF A SIGN (vs. 14-18)

14 “So when you see the ‘abomination of desolation,’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it ought not” (let the reader understand), “then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.
15 Let him who is on the housetop not go down into the house, nor enter to take anything out of his house.
16 And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes.
17 But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days!
18 And pray that your flight may not be in winter.

1. The Bible teaches us that after the LORD removes His Church from this world there will be a seven year period called “The Tribulation.” While the first three-and-a-half years of the Tribulation will be characterized by temporary peace throughout the world, the last three-and-a-half years will be characterized by the worst violence, corruption, and devastation this world has ever known. That three-and-a-half year period is referred to as “The Great Tribulation.”
Jeremiah 30:7 refers to it as “the time of Jacob’s trouble”——which is referring to the Jewish people collectively. In other words, during The Great Tribulation, the nation of Israel is going to be in “the eye-of-the-storm”——Israel is going to be “ground zero” for the awful events that will unfold during the Great Tribulation.

2. Why does this “Great Tribulation” have to occur? Basically for two reasons.

(A) It will be a time to PUNISH the GENTILE nations.  
(Romans 1:18; II Thessalonians 2:12,13, Revelation 19:15)

For thousands of years men have rejected God and spurned His call to repentance, and rejected God’s salvation. For the time being God has exercised extreme patience, “not willing that anyone should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” (II Peter 3:9)

But there is coming a time when GOD will close the door of His grace and punish those who rejected His salvation. That punishment will come during “The Great Tribulation.”

The other reason for “The Great Tribulation” is that…..

(B) It will be a time to PURGE the people of ISRAEL.  
(Ezekiel 20:37,38; Zechariah 13:8,9; Malachi 3:3)

Remember while Christ was here the Jewish people and their religious leaders rejected Jesus as their Messiah and ultimately played the key role in His crucifixion. God is going to use the horrors of The Great Tribulation to turn the hearts of the Jewish people to Christ and to prepare them for His Second Coming.

Revelation 7 tells us that when Christ comes He will be welcomed by a remnant of 144,000 believing Jews who have accepted Him as their Savior and Messiah during the days of “The Great Tribulation.”
3. How will the Jewish people know "The Days of The Great Tribulation" are upon them. In verse 14 Jesus warns His disciples, "When you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it ought not" you will know "The Great Tribulation" is upon you.

4. Jesus is referring back to Daniel's prophecy of "The 70 Weeks" in Daniel 9. The 70 weeks refers to "weeks of years." A "week of years" consists of seven years. In his prophecy Daniel sees the fulfillment of 69 of the 70 "weeks of years." Those "69 weeks" represent God's dealings with the Jewish people in the Old Testament from the giving of the Law to Moses on Mount Sinai until the death of Christ. Because Israel rejected Christ the 70th "week of years" has been on hold for the past two thousand years. These past two thousand years "the spotlight" has been upon the Lord's Church, while Israel has remained in the shadows. But after the LORD comes to get His Church, Israel will once again take center stage and be in the "spotlight." That is when the "70th Week of Years" will begin for Israel. That "70th Week of Years" is the seven years of the Tribulation.

As I mentioned earlier, the first 3 1/2 years of the Tribulation will be a time of world peace. But the last 3 1/2 years will be the darkest days in the history of the world, that is the period of "The Great Tribulation."

5. Jesus is telling His disciples, and all of us, that "the sign" that will signal "The Great Tribulation" has begun is when they see "The Abomination of Desolation standing in the Temple in Jerusalem."

Now remember at the beginning of this 13th chapter Jesus told His disciples that the Temple in Jerusalem was going to be utterly destroyed and not one stone would remain on top of another. And in 70 A.D., just 40 years after the crucifixion of Jesus, the Temple was destroyed during the Roman invasion of Jerusalem and there hasn’t been a Temple in Jerusalem since then.
6. This tells us that at some time in the future there is going to be a new Temple built in Jerusalem. The “blueprint” for this Temple is already given to us in the scriptures in Ezekiel chapters 38-41.

7. It is in this new, yet-to-be-built Temple, that “the abomination of desolation” will be set up signaling the beginning of “The Great Tribulation.”

“The abomination of desolation” refers to something that is “utterly blasphemous,” “something that is vile and disgusting,” “something that is totally abhorrent to God.”

Just what is this awful thing? It is likely some kind of idol or image of the anti-Christ that is set up inside the holy Temple that people are to bow down and worship in place of God.

8. Jesus says in verse 14, when you see this hideous thing set up inside the Temple, “let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.” In today’s vernacular Jesus is saying, “run for your lives!” Revelation 12:14 talks about the Jews “fleeing to the wilderness.” Isaiah 16 hints that the place they are to flee to is the ancient “rock city” of Petra. (Isaiah 16:1-5)

Jesus goes on to say in verse 15, “Let him who is on the housetop not go down into the house, nor enter to take anything out of his house.” Jesus is warning that the danger is going to be so imminent in those days they won’t even have time to pack up their possessions. He is saying, “You won't have time to worry about your “stuff,” just get out with the clothes on your back! Any delay will likely prove deadly!”

Moving on to verses 17,18, Jesus says, “But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! And pray that your flight may not be in winter.” Jesus is simply saying, this “flight to the mountains” will be especially hard on pregnant women and women with small children, and complicated even more if it happens in the cold winter months.
After giving **A WARNING OF A SIGN**......

II. Jesus Gives **A WARNING OF SORROWS** (vs. 19,20)

19 For in those days there will be tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the creation which God created until this time, nor ever shall be.

20 And unless the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect’s sake, whom He chose, He shortened the days.

1. When a terrible storm is brewing you and I can look out on the horizon and see the dark, ominous clouds gathering. When we see those dark cloud we know we will soon experience high winds .......horrific lightning.......and heavy downpours of rain.

2. As Jesus looks into the future He sees “the darkest days in the entire history of the world on the horizon.”

What Jesus sees are “two sets of intense judgments” that will take place in **the three-and-a-half years of the Great Tribulation.**

**THE SEVEN TRUMPET JUDGMENTS**
Revelation 8-9

**The First Trumpet Judgment (Rev. 8:7)** 1/3 of all the vegetation on the earth is going to be destroyed.

**The Second Trumpet Judgment (Rev. 8:8-9)** 1/3 of the world’s ocean and sea waters will turn to blood killing 1/3 of all sea life.

**The Third Trumpet Judgment (Rev. 8:10-11)** A huge meteor or astroid is going to fall down from the heavens and it will pollute 1/3 of the freshwater supply on the earth, and multitudes of people will die from drinking the poisoned water.

**The Fourth Trumpet Judgment (Rev. 8:12)** Some cataclysmic event is going to occur in the heavens that will diminish the sun light and moonlight by one-third.
The Fifth Trumpet Judgment (Rev. 9:1-12) The earth will be invaded by an army of demons for a period of five months, and the demons will inflict so much pain and suffering on humanity that people will beg to die, but will not be able to, even if they try to commit suicide.

The Sixth Trumpet Judgment (Rev. 9:13-21) A second wave of demonic invasion will occur and one-third of the world’s population will be destroyed.

The Seventh Trumpet will sound signaling the Second Coming of Jesus and announcing the beginning of “The Seven Bowl Judgments.” (Revelation 11:15-19)

THE SEVEN BOWL JUDGMENTS
Revelation 16

The First Bowl Judgment (Rev. 16:2) The whole world will be afflicted with cancerous sores.

The Second Bowl Judgment (Rev. 16:3) The waters of every ocean and sea will turn to blood killing off all marine life.

The Third Bowl Judgment (Rev. 16:4-7) All fresh-water streams, creeks, rivers, and lakes will be turned to blood.

The Fourth Bowl Judgment (Rev. 16:8-9) The sun’s heat will increase to the most intense temperatures ever experienced in all of history and the bodies of men will be blistered and burned, and yet man will still refuse to repent of his sins.

The Fifth Bowl Judgment (Rev. 16:10) will bring a plague of intense darkness upon the whole earth as well as pain upon every inhabitant of the earth that will be so intense people will be gnawing on their own tongues in agony, and yet mankind will still refuse to repent.

The Sixth Bowl Judgment (Rev. 16:12-14) The mighty Euphrates River will completely dry up, preparing a pathway for all the armies of the world to descend upon Israel for the Battle of Armageddon.
The Seventh Bowl Judgment (Rev. 16:17-21) will bring an earthquake that is so massive and so intense it will cause every island to sink into the sea and all the mountains of earth will fall flat, and every major city on earth will be utterly destroyed. And as if that weren’t bad enough, massive hailstones weighing 125 lbs. each will fall down from the heavens.

Jesus tells His disciples that not since the Creation of this world has devastation, and destruction, and death of this magnitude been seen upon the earth.

**JESUS GAVE HIS DISCIPLES A WARNING OF A SIGN and A WARNING OF SORROWS.** Now in verses 21-23...........

**III. Jesus Gives A WARNING OF SEDUCTION (vs. 21-23)**

21 “Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or, ‘Look, He is there!’ do not believe it.
22 For false christs and false prophets will rise and show signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.
23 But take heed; see, I have told you all things beforehand.

1. Remember earlier in verses 5,6 Jesus already warned His disciples of the increase in deception as the time of His return draws near.

2. Now keep in mind everything I just told you about the great sorrows that will come upon the earth during The Great Tribulation in the form of the Seven Trumpet Judgments and The Seven Bowl Judgments. The inhabitants of the world will be in so much pain and so much agony they will be easy prey for every “false christ and false prophet” that comes along.

3. Satan will empower these “false christs and false prophets” with the power to perform “counterfeit miracles” that will appear to be so real and so authentic that even “the elect” or the followers of Christ could easily be fooled by these hucksters.
4. Of course this will set the stage for the rise of the Anti-Christ, Satan’s “counterfeit Jesus” who will force the unrepentant world to bow down and worship him as God; sealing the eternal damnation of every human being who refused to accept Christ.

CONCLUSION

While we should bow down and give thanks to Almighty God that Christ will come and take us out of this world before these horrific, darkest of all days happen, we should not dismiss this message as though it has no importance to us, because it does!

Do you have relatives that aren't Christians? A son? A daughter? A brother or sister? A mate? A grandchild? What if Christ comes and they haven't accepted Him as their Savior? Won't they get a second chance? The answer to that is “no!”

Paul writes in II Thessalonians 2:9-12 (NKJV)

9 The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders,
10 and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.
11 And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie,
12 that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

Paul is saying that those who had the opportunity to accept Christ but chose to reject Him, will not be given “a second chance” after the Lord comes! The door of salvation will be closed forever. And those who rejected Christ will not only live through these horrific dark days we have looked at in this message, they will be eternally condemned to hell.

And so to you who are here today who are outside of Christ, let me ask you something. How many more times are you going to walk out of these doors and turn your back on Jesus? How many more times are you going to refuse His invitation to be saved? Right now, the door is still open! Right now, the invitation is still offered!

“Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.” (II Corinthians 6:2 NKJV)