

THE COMING OF CHRIST

Mark 13:1-37

In the precincts of the temple our Lord had taught the teachable, rebuked the selfish, denounced the hypocrites and healed the afflicted. Having concluded His ministry there, He left the temple, never to enter it again. What solemn thoughts must have occupied His mind as He left the temple for the last time!

Due to the fact that the people had rejected the Messiah, Christ had made the prediction that the temple would be destroyed and the city would fall. The disciples were startled, shocked and stunned by His unexpected prediction. They were not able to grasp the full significance of it.

After a busy Tuesday of teaching in the temple, late in the afternoon Christ and His disciples left the temple to go to the Mount of Olives. Outside the gorgeous temple, one of our Lord's disciples, who was impressed greatly with the grandeur and beauty of the enormous stones in the building, proudly called His attention to the magnificent structure saying, "Master, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here!" Together they gazed upon a spectacle of such surpassing splendor and beauty that it was considered to be one of the wonders of the world, but all of its magnificence did not impress Christ in the least. He simply repeated His prediction that it would not be long until this majestic edifice would be leveled to the ground by the Roman armies. This was a shocking prediction in view of the fact that some of the stones in the Temple were $67\frac{1}{2}$ feet long, 7 feet high and 9 feet wide. Made of extremely white stones, the Temple appeared to be the summit of human art and achievement, and it gave one the impression that it would stand for ever. When Christ said that the day was coming when not one of these stones would stand upon another, he was referring to its fall during the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus in 70 A. D.

Christ and His disciples descended the mountain, crossed the Kedron and ascended the slope to the summit of the Mount of Olives. From that wonderful vantage point they had a view of the temple and its surroundings which was particularly striking. Unable to grasp the full significance of His prediction, it is not surprising that they had a strong desire to know when an event of such proportions was going to occur. Consequently, His most intimate disciples -- Peter, James and Andrew -- privately asked Him, "When shall these things be?" "What shall be the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled?"

In answering their questions Christ did not specify the exact date of the impending catastrophe, but our Lord cautioned them not to waste their thoughts, time and energies in seeking signs. Quite likely His reply did not satisfy their curiosity, but it did help immensely in their preparation for the trials to which they were to be subjected in the future. It should be remembered that the prophecy of our Saviour concerning the destruction of Jerusalem was fulfilled in 70 A. D. under Titus.

Many of us are like the early disciples in that we long to have the veil of the future lifted, but our Lord is too gracious and loving to gratify our wishes in this regard.

In His Olivet discourse Christ described some of the events that would transpire in this world during the interval between His departure from and return to this earth. From God's Word we learn that the era preceding the return of Christ and the end of the age would be characterized by increasing knowledge, craze for pleasure, confusion in the industrial realm, financial

insolvency, famines and pestilences, false teaching, apostasy from the faith, religious indifference and unconcern, disobedience to parents and degeneracy of life.

When we seriously consider the existing conditions in our beloved nation and contemplate its future, in the light of the teachings of God's Word, we are reminded of what Gibbon wrote about the Roman Empire in 1787. The causes of the fall of the Roman Empire, as enumerated by him merit our study and application. Gibbon listed them as follows:

1. The decline of home life.
2. Higher and higher taxes, with more and more people living from the taxes paid by others.
3. A craze for pleasure and sports.
4. The building of a gigantic army without thinking of the decadence of the people.
5. The decay of religion.

Can our nation follow the example of the Roman Empire and obtain a different result?

In granting the request of the disciples for information Christ told them what some of the signs of His return would be. However, He was very careful to caution them that in giving unmistakable signs of the approach of these great events, He was not setting any definite time. He was merely permitting His own to recognize events, when they did come, which would show plainly that the return of the Lord was near.

Our Lord indicated that before His return heretics and twisters of the truth would arise. Heresy arises from constructing doctrine to suit oneself, from overstressing one part of the truth, from trying to produce a religion which will be popular and attractive and suit people, and from separating oneself from the Christian fellowship.

God's Word teaches that in the last days there will be false prophets, coldness in religion, a great apostasy from the faith and an attitude of unconcern. Paul said that the time will come when "they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned into fables" (II Timothy 4:4). This turning away is taking place in doctrinal standards, in church attendance and in the observance of the Lord's Day. What influence does such apostasy have upon the unbelieving world other than to confirm it in its doubt, its indifference and its open antagonism to the gospel of Christ? Symptoms of this apostasy are evident in the present disinclination for prayer and for serious things, a disregard for Bible teachings, less serious views of sin and an unwillingness to receive reproof for sinning.

The return of Christ is the world's greatest future event. In view of the certainty of His return, this event presents a challenge to us. It is an incentive to preparedness, it urges spiritual alertness, it is conducive to purity of life, it produces patience in trial, it inspires sacrificial service and it is a great comfort to those who are in sorrow. Because our Redeemer is going to return, those of us who are Christians should wait in patience, walk in purity of life, weep in hopefulness, witness in faithfulness, work in diligence and watch in readiness; while those who are unsaved should repent of their sins, receive Christ as their Saviour and rejoice that He is coming to take His own to be with Him.