

The Gospel According to Mark - What Good Could Possibly Come From Persecution?

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What Good Could Possibly Come From Persecution?

Mark 13:9-13

"I cast my mind to Calvary where Jesus bled and died for me. I see His wounds, His hands His feet, My Savior on that cursed tree" When I wonder what I would do if I were to face persecution for my faith, I think that is exactly what I would have to do... "cast my mind to Calvary where Jesus bled and died for me. I see His wounds, His hands His feet, My Savior on that cursed tree." How could I deny the One who sacrificed His life so I could live forever? This morning we will continue to discuss Jesus' words on end times as found in Mark's Gospel. Let's pray and ask The Holy Spirit to give us discernment and understanding as we study. Prayer.

Introduction:

Last week we began our study of this portion of Mark's Gospel which is called the "Little Apocalypse." Apocalypse is a word usually associated with the end of the world. But in the Greek language it actually means "unveiling, or revelation and is a technical term for writings which claimed to offer a glimpse behind the curtain which veils the purposes and activities of God." Broadman Commentary. Jesus and the Disciples had been over at the temple complex in Jerusalem and a discussion had ensued concerning the eventual destruction of the temple and that led to a discussion of the end of time as we know it! For those of you who might not have been here, lets just pick up a few verses back and then get to our text for today...

Mark 13:3 As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John and Andrew asked him privately,

Mark 13:4 "Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?"

Mark 13:5 Jesus said to them: "Watch out that no one deceives you.

Mark 13:6 Many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and will deceive many.

Mark 13:7 When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come.

Mark 13:8 Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains.

Mark 13:9 "You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them.

Mark 13:10 And the gospel must first be preached to all nations.

Mark 13:11 Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.

Mark 13:12 "Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death.

Mark 13:13 All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.

Last week we discovered this: "when" Jesus is going to return is not as important as us "being ready whenever" He returns! We also discovered that we have a God given purpose and various tasks that accompany that purpose! We are to be busy doing those things while we wait for the return of Christ. There's certainly a lot going on in our world today, and it sure seems to point to the end times. Does this cause any of you fear? Do you think people are thinking about the end of the world? Where will all this end? Are we in the last days? As I told you last week, most people are curious about when the end of time, as we know it, will take place. There are many differing views on the events that will lead up to the second coming of Christ and there are many opinions concerning the timing and order of events.

When I was a young Christian back in the 70's, there was a well known author, Hal Lindsay, who had written a book called "The Late Great Planet Earth!" I read it and therefore thought I was an expert on all things "Apocalyptic!" I've since discovered otherwise! Now some of what I'm about to tell you, you may not like, or agree with, but hear me out. At least understand this: What you believe about the order of end time events does not affect your salvation! In other words, you don't have to have a particular viewpoint on the second coming of Jesus to be saved! So here we go! When it comes to the great tribulation spoken of in the Bible some believe the return of Christ will be...

Pre-tribulation

Others believe it will be...

Mid-tribulation

And still others believe it will be...

Post-tribulation

And when it comes to the thousand year reign of Christ spoken of in the Book of Revelation 20, there are multiple beliefs, but here are four...

Dispensational premillennialism, historic premillennialism, postmillennialism, and amillennialism

We don't have time to get into all of that this morning, so let me just say there are very dedicated followers of Christ in each of the different camps and once again, what you believe about the details of the end times is not what makes you Christian or not! As I said last week and will reiterate this week, is this:

It's not when Jesus comes that is most important, it's that we are ready whenever He returns! With this in mind I want to share with you some thoughts on our text today and how understanding the context of our passage will help us interpret the passage. When we look at the context we discover...

A false assumption about the end times and persecution...

Some people have developed their view of the end times based on an erroneous idea that God wouldn't let His children face the kind of persecution which will take place during the tribulation. That is a purely western idea. Tell that to Christians in the middle east, in China, or in Muslim controlled parts of Africa. One of our Church members has recently been on a mission trip to Sudan and could give us some interesting insight into what Christian people there face on a daily basis. Again, we must consider the context of a passage when trying to interpret the Bible. So looking at the context of our passage today, we must ask ourselves who Jesus was speaking to? He wasn't talking to unbelievers, but to the disciples. When He said the things He said to them about persecution, He didn't say, "but you guys don't have to worry about anything because you're Christian and My followers will already be raptured out of the world!" He didn't say that! The word rapture is actually not found in the Bible, but is a Latin word that has been used to describe the words "caught up together" which we read in the following passage...

1 Th 4:15 According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.

1 Th 4:16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

1 Th 4:17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

1 Th 4:18 Therefore encourage each other with these words.

So when the Bible talks about the second coming and followers of Jesus being caught up in the air with Him, the word rapture is often used to describe that event. The timing of that event, pre-tribulation, mid-tribulation, or post-tribulation is what is so many times debated. However, the word rapture has been adopted by the folks who take a pre-tribulation view. They use the word to describe an event they believe will take place before the second coming of Jesus and before the great tribulation in which followers of Christ are taken to heaven. I don't find this view supported by Scripture, but let me say this: If the Lord takes us out before the great tribulation, awesome. However, if He doesn't, you and I need to be ready to continue doing our God-given task of being Ambassadors for Christ and sharing His grace, love and mercy to people who are going to desperately need the message of the Gospel. We talked about that in some detail last week, about our job description as Ambassadors for Christ. Thinking about end times and potential persecution, Jesus says this in our text...

Be on your guard!

Mark 13:9 "You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them.

Now what I am about to say is very, very important, so listen up! Jesus gave some very important warnings to us. He said persecution will come because of our identification with Him! He also said we will stand

before governors and kings as witnesses to them! That's awesome and scary all at the same time! What a privilege we may have to stand before leaders of the world and witness to them of the truth and the love of God in Christ! However, we must understand this: If we are to be good witnesses to them, it stands to reason that the testimony of our life will need to be authentic, genuine, true and filled with integrity. Where do I get this idea? From Jesus' words found in the "Little Apocalypse" in Luke's Gospel. Here Jesus says...

Luke 21:34 "Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap.

Luke 21:35 For it will come upon all those who live on the face of the whole earth.

Luke 21:36 Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man."

Escape what things? Some people would like to think of escaping persecution. But if you look at the context you'll realize Jesus is not only talking about getting through all the external things that will come against us during the tribulation like persecution, but He is also talking about being on guard and escaping things that are more of our own making...

"dissipation and drunkenness and the anxieties of this life"

Dissipation - Deceptive desires leading to a life-style without discipline resulting in the dizzy hangovers of drunkenness.

I'm not trying to be judgmental here, but there are people who claim to follow Jesus and yet there is not enough difference between the way they live their lives and the way people of the world live their lives to tell the difference. Peter gave a wonderful bit of wisdom to us in a passage that discusses persecution.

1 Pet 4:1 Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin.

1 Pet 4:2 As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God.

1 Pet 4:3 For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do--living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry.

1 Pet 4:4 They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you.

So you may be maliciously slandered and mocked because you don't live the way the world says you've got to live in order to have fun, but I encourage you to understand and hold on to the truth found down in verse 7 and 8...

1 Pet 4:7 The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray.

1 Pet 4:8 Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.

So we should pray for strength and wisdom to escape the dissipation and drunkenness of this life, but also pray to be delivered from...

Anxieties and Worries of this life

Many Christians in the world today are so preoccupied with the cares of this life they totally miss the opportunities God places before them each and everyday to be light and hope to someone who is hurting, lonely and lost. And if we live that way now, with all the modern conveniences and comforts, just think of how preoccupied with the anxieties of this life we will be when faced with persecution! Jesus said we will have difficulties in this life and He wasn't just talking about end times tribulation. Listen...

John 16:33 "...In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

From this we know Jesus was not telling His disciples they were to try and escape all hardship in life, but to take heart because He had overcome the world so that we would not be weighed down by the worries of this life! Jesus' instruction to not be weighted down by the anxieties and worries of this life was never intended by Him as an admonition to disengage oneself from daily life in this world. To do so would be to totally abandon our purpose in this world. People who do this are in danger of worse tragedy than that which they hoped to escape.

Jim Jones, of the Jamestown tragedy, preached escapism and convinced over 1,000 people to leave the

U.S. for Guyana South America and a supposed utopia. He eventually convinced them that he was God and they followed him in committing mass suicide in 1978. Over 900 died on the same day. Let me remind you of a verse we read last week. Jesus said...

Mark 13:6 Many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and will deceive many.

Jim Jones claimed he was being persecuted because of his religion. The truth: Jim Jones was suspected of serious human rights violations: child abuse, holding people against their will, and even murder. God's Word says this...

1 Pet 4:15 If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler.

So that's obviously an extreme case, but I need to say this about other not so extreme cases: some people are persecuted, not because of Christ, but because of their foolish actions. Some who claim to be followers of Christ have horrible attitudes. Like being...

Obnoxious/Mean spirited/Condescending/Prideful/Arrogant

So sometimes people who say "I'm being persecuted for my faith" may in fact be experiencing rejection based on their terrible disposition! There are times people are not being persecuted for the sake of Christ, but due to their mean spirited ways of presenting the gospel. I love the way Dr. Jeff Nave puts it: "Just be nice!" Now just being nice doesn't mean you throw out your God-given convictions and the truth of God's Word! Sometimes people may call you mean just for standing up for the truth. I get that, but we must make absolutely sure we have shared the truth and our faith in love! Listen to God's Word on this...

1 Pet 3:14 But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened."

1 Pet 3:15 But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,

1 Pet 3:16 keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.

1 Pet 3:17 It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

I don't know if you've noticed, but it's seeming more and more likely we may suffer for doing good. We simply don't have the time to get into a lot of details about what I'm about to tell you and I'm not trying to worry you, but we must get prepared for possible persecution. Did you know that in many states, people in authority who are making policy are now calling it abusive if a counselor or pastor seeks to share the simple message of God's great love for people who are struggling with sexual identity and tells them what God's Word says about the subject and encourages them to trust Jesus to help them follow God's moral principles. In other words, you can encourage them in one direction, but not the other! Please hear me out. I have friends who know where I stand on this issue and who attend our church from time to time, who disagree with me on my stand, but they know that I love them, lift them in my prayers, and that I would be there to minister to them in their time of need! Unfortunately, the narrative in our nation is now being controlled by people who say there is no room for anyone with a different viewpoint from popular culture!

Interestingly enough, I read an article just a few days ago that labeled people who hold to a Biblical world view as "Christian Supremacist!" Folks, the stage is being set for Christian persecution right here in the good ole USA! However, we must remember, there are places in our world where a person's life can be taken just because they claim to follow Jesus! We are still blessed in this nation that it has not come to that! And we owe that freedom to God blessing America, and the brave men and women of our military who down through the years have fought for those freedoms overseas and for the ones who've stood ready in times of peace to answer the call if and when it comes! And thank God for the men and women of law enforcement who defend our freedoms here at home each and every day! But even with all of that, we may be coming to a time of persecution.

So what good could possibly come from persecution? We've already been given a huge hint by Jesus when He said...

Mark 13:9 "You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them.

Mark 13:10 And the gospel must first be preached to all nations.

The good that could possibly come from persecution is our witness to people of the good news of Jesus. But Jesus said we must be on our guard! We've already talked about being on guard against the temptation to live lives that are laced with evil, inconsistencies and hypocrisy. The other thing we must guard against is ...

The intense pressure that will be brought upon believers to renounce their faith

What evidence does Jesus give that indicates the intensity of the persecution?

Mark 13:12 "Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death.

Mark 13:13 All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.

Yes it will be that bad! Some families will be divided by the tension caused when someone holds on to the truth of God's Word even if they do so with great love and humility!

Why will Christians face persecution even when their witness is one of love, humility and serving others? Jesus gives us the reason in John 15...

John 15:18 "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first.

John 15:19 If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.

John 15:20 Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also.

John 15:21 They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me.

What good could possibly come from persecution? The way you answer the following question holds the key.

How will you act and react when persecution comes your way?

Do you really think that anyone will be changed just because I have a Christ-like Spirit when I'm being persecuted?

YES!

It's what happened when Jesus was persecuted.

Luke 23:46 Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last.

Luke 23:47 The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, "Surely this was a righteous man."

Luke 23:48 When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away.

It's what happened when Paul and Silas were flogged and imprisoned!

Acts 16:23 After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully.

Acts 16:24 Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

Acts 16:25 About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.

Acts 16:26 Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose.

Acts 16:27 The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped.

Acts 16:28 But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!"

Acts 16:29 The jailer shouted for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas.

Acts 16:30 He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

Acts 16:31 They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved--you and your household."

Acts 16:32 Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house.

Acts 16:33 At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized.

Acts 16:34 The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God--he and his whole family.

Remember it was this Paul, once named Saul, who had persecuted Christians and who was at the stoning of Stephen. Stephen's face showed the glory of God and he prayed for those stoning him to death to be forgiven. God used that to change Paul's life and God used Paul's life to bring the gospel to the world. Paul wrote much of the New Testament!

Listen, no man or woman in their right mind would look forward to the emotional hardship and physical pain that accompany persecution, however, the resulting witness and potential to impact souls for an eternity should give us the strength and courage to endure any thing for our Lord's sake. If you are brought before a local council or government to testify, who will you depend on to help you prepare your testimony? Jesus said...

Mark 13:11 Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.

What good could possible come from persecution? God, through His Holy Spirit could use you to spark the next great spiritual awakening in our country, our community, your school, your family or He could use you simply to reach one lost soul He died to save!
Let's pray!!!