

Sermon outline and notes:

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## Mark 13:9-27 “The Coming Tribulation & Second Coming”

Intro. Last Sunday I shared with you the first part of chapter 13, where Jesus predicted the destruction of the beautiful temple in Jerusalem, & He told of the signs that pointed to the fulfillment of that prophecy in 70 A.D. I believe those same signs not only pointed to the destruction of the temple, but they also serve as early signs of the return of Christ. Today we are going to look at events that will take place right before the Second Coming of Christ. We will also discuss the Second Coming itself. Since Jesus was 100% accurate regarding the prophecies that have been fulfilled to date, I believe we should give heed to His prophecies that have yet to be fulfilled.

In this prophecy we see that the Second Coming of Christ will be preceded by a time period known as the Tribulation. Christ says nothing here about a pretribulational rapture of the Church. In fact, our text today refers to a *post*-tribulational gathering of the elect when Christ returns. Does that mean that we are going to experience the Tribulation before Christ returns? Well, the Bible clearly teaches a rapture of believers, that we will be caught up to meet the Lord when He comes again (1 Thess. 4:13-18). What is not as clear is the timing of the rapture of believers.

There *are* arguments for the pretribulational rapture of the Church, & we can hope that the great tribulational events of this prophecy will not directly affect us. For example, in Rev. 3:10 Jesus said, “Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.” In John 14:2-3 Jesus said, “In My Father’s house are many mansions.... I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.” That seems to imply that Christ will come & take us to heaven, & not that He will come again only to take us back to earth with Him. Then we could argue along these lines. The wrath of God is poured out at least during the last part of the Great Tribulation. 1 Th. 5:9 says, “For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.” So the rapture mentioned in that context is for the purpose of removing us from the world before God’s wrath is poured out. Finally, there are several Scriptures that state or imply that Jesus is coming at any time (doctrine of imminence). For example, 1 Cor. 1:7 talks about “eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ....” Several times Christ says, “I am coming quickly!” (Revelation 3:11; 22:7, 12, 20). If there must be several years of tribulation before Jesus comes again, then why would anyone always be looking for Christ’s return?<sup>1</sup> While these arguments are not airtight, they are at least credible.

But on the other hand, there are quite a few evangelical scholars who believe that believers will go through at least half or almost all of the tribulation period that is coming. That is certainly not a popular position as you can imagine. I have studied most of the arguments for both interpretations, & while I’m hopeful that Jesus will come again before the tribulation, I also want to be prepared regardless of whatever interpretation is correct. Besides, even if the rapture occurs before the tribulation, that doesn’t mean we will not face persecution & hardships before Christ

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<sup>1</sup> However, James 5:7-8 says, “See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.” The harvest is not anticipated to arrive at any time, but the farmer still keeps looking for the harvest.

returns. In fact, Paul said in Acts 14:22, “We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.” So with that in mind, let’s look into our text together, & prepare ourselves for the end times that we are facing, & for the return of Christ. After all, I see more evidence of the approach of the Tribulation than ever before. First of all, let’s consider once again:

## I. THE MANDATE FOR THE LAST DAYS

As we saw last Sunday, Jesus said in v.10, “And the gospel must (*dei*) first be preached to all the nations.” Matthew’s account adds, “and then the end will come” (24:14). The good news of salvation in Jesus Christ must be preached to all nations before Christ will come & establish His kingdom on earth. Later, Jesus said in His Great Commission, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Mt. 28:19-20). Jesus implies that world evangelism will continue all the way to the end of this present evil age. So this mandate to reach the nations with the Gospel continues to this present day, & even on through the Tribulation period. Let us, therefore, do our part to go, to pray, & to give.

So we see what our mission is. Now as we seek to fulfill this mandate, we need to understand several truths that are brought out in this text of Scripture. For example:

A. Jesus Warns That His People Will Face Persecution – Satan & the forces of evil will fight & oppose every attempt to win people to Jesus. So Jesus warns that the apostles & other believers would be persecuted. We should not be surprised by it, but expect it. This persecution became more widespread & intense just a few years before the fall of Jerusalem, and it will be intense in the last days before the coming of Christ. Jesus says in v.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....” Here Jesus warns that His apostles & other missionaries would be arrested & beaten.

Jesus warns that persecution will come from every source. For example, persecution would come:

1. By Religion – He said in v.9, “you will be beaten in the synagogues....” The Jews were the first religious persecutors. Today, the greatest religious persecutors of the church are not Jews but Muslims. In India Hindus are persecuting Christians, even unto death.

2. By Government – Actually, enemies of Christ will use the government as a tool of persecution. He also said in v.9, “for they will deliver you up to councils.... You will be brought before rulers and kings....”<sup>2</sup> That is exactly what happened. Many of the apostles were brought before the ruling council of the Jews, and then later before Gentile rulers and kings.<sup>3</sup> The Roman government carried out ten persecutions against the Church (from Nero to Diocletian) over a span of about 250 years, and the last one was also the most violent. Its aim was to terminate the church. It began A.D. 303. But even this supreme effort was in vain. Tertullian was right, “Go on, rack, torture, grind us to powder: our numbers increase in proportion as you mow us down. The blood of

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<sup>2</sup> McGee is so dispensational in his interpretation that he believes this is a reference to Anti-Semitism!

<sup>3</sup> Brooks: The "governors" would include such persons as Sergius Paulus (Acts 3:7), Gallio (Acts 18:12), Felix (Acts 24), and Festus (Acts 25-26). The Kings would include Jewish client-kings such as Herod Agrippa I (Acts 12) and Herod Agrippa II (Acts 25-26) and perhaps even the emperor himself (Acts 25:11-12; 27:24).

Christians is their harvest seed.” Paganism, at least officially, met its doom, A.D. 312. Nothing, but nothing—not even Hades—can prevail against the church.

Jesus also warned that His followers would be opposed:

3. By Family Members – He says in v.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.” Here Jesus adds that believers will even die for their faith.

History supplies numerous illustrations of the kind here indicated. The parents of a son, who was born blind and who with his vision restored accepted the Healer as his Lord, behaved in a cowardly manner. They refused to join their son in his frank and precious confession. That’s because they feared expulsion from the synagogue (John 9).

Friend, here is a good reason to seek to win every member of your family to Christ. If you don’t, they could turn on you in the last days!

Furthermore, Jesus warned that His followers would also be opposed:

4. By Many Others – He says in v.13, “And you will be hated by all for My name’s sake.” This prophecy was first fulfilled during the Roman persecutions, & will be fulfilled again in the last days. So if you want to follow the crowd, following Christ is not for you. Except for unusual times of revival, we can expect to be in a small minority in this world, especially in the last days, which will be a time of apostasy. You see, because the world hates Christ it also hates His representatives. If we identify with Jesus Christ, we can expect the world to treat us the way it treated Him. Jesus said in John 15:20, “If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you.”

The first application of this truth is given by Jesus Himself in v.9, “But watch out for yourselves...” We need to be on the lookout for the danger of persecution. We need to be on the lookout for any attempt to erode our religious liberty in our country. Right now we have constitutional protection against persecution. But the day is quickly coming that our government will limit or even prohibit evangelism, and speaking out against sin. So persecution could well occur even in our country, and has even begun in some respects.

Furthermore, even if we face persecution, we must not allow that to keep us from sharing Christ both here and abroad. So note with me something else Jesus teaches here:

B. We Must Take Advantage of Witnessing Opportunities – In the last of v.9 Jesus said, “You will be brought before rulers and kings for My sake, for a testimony to them.” It was important that the believers use these experiences as opportunities to witness for Jesus Christ.

Just the other day in my daily Bible reading, I read about the time Paul & Silas were persecuted & cast into prison. Yet Acts 16:25 says, “But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.” Notice that they took advantage of the opportunity to bear witness to their fellow prisoners.

We need to be mindful of any opportunity to bear witness to the Lord, and take advantage of those opportunities. When God providentially places you in a new & different situation, it may well be that He has placed you there to be a witness to someone. Don’t be intimidated by persecution, but bear witness all the more!

A third truth we see here about witnessing is this:

C. The Holy Spirit Will Help Us – The apostles were common men. You can imagine how intimidating it would be for them to stand before kings & other rulers. So Jesus said in v.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.” Jesus assured them that the Holy Spirit would minister through them whenever they had opportunity to witness. He will give you the words to say. If we are walking in the Spirit, we will have no trouble bearing witness for Christ when the opportunities arrive (John 15:26-27).

This prophecy was gloriously fulfilled in the speeches of Peter, John, & Paul, as we see in the book of Acts (4:8-12, 19, 20; 21:39-22:21). They spoke so boldly, fluently, & with such knowledge & conviction. In fact, Acts 4:13 says, “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus.”

Now this is no verse for a lazy preacher to use as an excuse for not preparing a sermon. Nor is this an excuse for you not to prepare your Sunday School lesson. This verse is primarily a prohibition against anxiety, not against preparation. When you are placed in a situation where you have an opportunity to witness of Christ, just trust in the Holy Spirit to help you say what you need to say.

Finally, in spite of persecution, Jesus indicates here that we should:

D. Be Faithful to the End – Jesus said in the last of v.13, “But he who endures to the end shall be saved.” Our primary focus should be on the word “endure.” The Greek word (*hupomeno*) refers to patient endurance. Jesus warns of persecution. Times will get tough. So He calls for faithful endurance. Don’t quit. Don’t turn against Christ when the going gets tough.

This appeal is encouraged with a promise. He says, “he who endures to the end shall be saved.” Since “the end” in v.7 means “the end of the age,” that is likely what it means in v.13. This could mean that endurance is the evidence of true salvation. Especially in times of persecution, false believers will turn from Christ, but true believers will remain faithful.

On the other hand, it could refer to deliverance from death that will come to any surviving believers when Jesus comes again at the close of the Tribulation. This seems to be the meaning in v.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.” There we see that some of the elect will be saved from physical death. Then according to v.27, when Jesus comes again, “He will send His angels, and gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest part of earth to the farthest part of heaven.”

What would you do if it really cost you to maintain your Christian profession? Will you remain faithful, no matter what the cost? Is your Christian faith real?

So we have seen the mandate for the last days. The church has always faced persecution. But there is one group of believers that will face an especially tough time. Now let’s move on to my second main point & see the warning of:

## II. THE MISERY OF THE LAST DAYS

I’m talking in particular about the time period known as “the Great Tribulation.” He says in v.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.” The word translated “tribulation” literally refers to being under intense pressure. He says it will be worse than ever before. Can you imagine a time period even worse than the Holocaust of WWII? Well, days of great tribulation are coming to this world.

This prophecy of a great tribulation was not new. It was foretold in the Old Testament also. In this context (v.14) Jesus mentions the prophecy of Daniel the prophet. Well in Daniel 9 he tells

of a final 7 year period that will wrap up this present evil age and God's dealing with Israel. The first three and a half years of it are comparatively quiet; it is the false peace of the Antichrist. But the last three and a half years will be a time of great distress such as the world has never seen or will ever see again. For example, we read in the Book of Revelation that during the Tribulation one third of the population of the earth will be destroyed. In v.20 Jesus says, "And unless the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh would be saved...." Clearly it will be a time of widespread death from persecution, war, disease, natural disasters, & ultimately the pouring out of God's wrath.

Now notice with me a few truths brought out here about this time period of great misery & suffering. Notice first of all:

A. The Time of Great Suffering Will Be Signaled – The Great Tribulation will not come without one or more signs to signal the beginning of those days. The disciples had asked, "Tell us, when will this happen?" Jesus has already shown that many disturbances will occur (vv.5-9). These however, do not mark the end. But here he tells His people how they can know that the end is near. He says in v.14, "So when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it ought not (let the reader understand),...."<sup>4</sup>

So what will be the sign of the beginning of the Great Tribulation? It will be "the abomination of desolation." Jesus quotes Daniel here (see Dan. 9:27; 11:31; 12:11). They both are referring to an abomination or desecration of a holy place that will lead to its desolation. In fact, Jesus had recently said, "Behold, your house is left to you a deserted place." Just 10 years after this prophecy of Jesus, there was an early fulfillment that eventually led to the desolation of Jerusalem. Emperor Caligula tried to set up his statue in the Jerusalem temple in A.D. 40. The Jews rebelled with passion against this, and such rebellion set the stage for what followed. The fact that this prophecy also points to the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. is clear from the parallel passage in Luke 21:20, "When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near." Sure enough, about 26 years later the Jews declared independence from Rome, and then the Roman armies laid siege to the city of Jerusalem. Their armies broke through the city walls & temple courts with the image of the emperor upon their standards, an image and an emperor worshipped by them. Contrary to Jewish law, Titus the Gentile entered the holy of holies and removed various items and took them to Rome to adorn his victory procession.<sup>5</sup> That desecration of the holy place resulted in the desolation of Jerusalem.

At this point, you should understand an important principle of prophecy. In prophecy, two or more events can be viewed as one. The "prophet" views the future as a traveler beholds a distant mountain range. He sees one peak rising right behind another. And from where he stands, he describes the future exactly as he sees it, as one. Yet, the closer one gets to the first peak, the greater the distance is seen to be between peak No. 1 and peak No. 2. For example, Messiah's first coming and His second coming unto judgment are seen as one in Isa. 11:1-4 and in 61:1, 2. So are also Pentecost and "the great and terrible day of the Lord," in Joel 2:28-31. Yet we now know that the fulfillments of those prophecies are separated by some 2,000 years or more.

Now, fast forward to the end times. The Antichrist will bring about the final fulfillment of this prophecy. One question is "How and where?" Mark's rather obscure phrase "standing where he ought not" is clarified by Matthew's "standing in the holy place". This prophecy implies that the temple will be rebuilt in Jerusalem, and the Antichrist will go to the temple and demand to be

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<sup>4</sup> It's interesting that Jesus said in v.7 concerning the early signs, "Do not be troubled...." I wonder if the people who recognize v. 14 coming to pass can be troubled at that point!

<sup>5</sup> Josephus, War 6.4.7; 7.5.5; the Arch of Titus in Rome.

worshipped as God. This is confirmed by Paul in 2 Thess. 2:4.<sup>6</sup> So when that happens, all hell is about to break loose on this earth. And so notice:

So the Lord gives one key sign that will signal the start of the Great Tribulation. Armed with this knowledge, Jesus calls upon the Tribulation to follow the course of action listed in the last of v.14 to v.22. I do not have time to cover those verses in detail today.

But in v.20 the Lord gives a word of hope here. We also see the fact that:

B. The Suffering Will Be Limited – He says, “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.” For the sake of His chosen ones, in order that not all might have to die a violent death, the Lord decided to cut short the days of the final tribulation. The Lord will not allow this difficult period to go on and on. In fact, when we compare Daniel & Revelation, we can conclude that this time period will last no longer than 3 1/2 years. To those believers who suffer during this time, they will have hope that their suffering will not last very long. It really helps us to bear under suffering as long as we can see an end to it.

You know, that is always the truth for the child of God. He may allow us to suffer, but our suffering is always limited. But if you die without Christ, your suffering will never end!

So this promise of limited suffering leads to my final point. Beginning in v.24 we move from the misery of the last days to:

### III. THE MANIFESTATION IN THE FINAL DAY

The bad news for this world is that the “Great Tribulation” is coming. But the good news is that it will pave the way for the Son of man’s brilliant return. Notice first of all:

A. It Will Be Preceded by Cosmic Disturbances – Once again, signs will precede such a major prophetic event. In vv.24-25 Jesus says, “But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars of heaven will fall, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.” The second coming of Christ is introduced by the darkening of the universe and cosmic disturbances, a fulfillment of Joel 2:28-32 & other Old Testament Scriptures (see also Isa 13:10; Ezek 32:7-8; Joel 2:10; 3:15). So what we see here is deeply rooted in Old Testament prophecy.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, it must be interpreted in the light of that literary genre. This means that an extremely literal interpretation must be avoided. Until this prophetic picture becomes history, we will probably not know how much must be taken literally, how much figuratively.

B. Jesus Will Come Again in Great Power & Glory! – In v.26 Jesus says, “Then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory.” It is significant that the term “Son of Man” is used here. The same one who humbly ministered on earth (10:45), the same one who suffered and died (8:31), will return with “great power and glory.”

What will the return of Jesus be like? His return will be visible to all. Matthew 24:27 says, “For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son

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<sup>6</sup> “who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.”

<sup>7</sup> See Hendriksen on Mt. 24:29ff.

of Man be.” Thus, contrary to what we read in v.21, no one will need to announce it.<sup>8</sup> The glorious manner of His appearance corresponds exactly with the prediction of Dan. 7:13, “Behold, One like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven!” (cf. Matt. 26:64). Likewise, Revelation 1:7 says, “Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him....” Those are not rain clouds that He is describing. They are the glory clouds, the Shekinah glory.

1. To Vindicate Himself – The world has rejected Jesus, and the world will instead embrace & worship the Antichrist. But God will have the last word! By granting His Son such a glorious return, He will give definite proof of His delight in His Son, though He was rejected by the world. In that day, no one will be able to doubt the deity of Christ.

2. To Deliver & Gather His Elect – Jesus says in v.27, “And then He will send His angels,<sup>9</sup> and gather together [*episunago*] His elect from the four winds, from the farthest part of earth to the farthest part of heaven.” In a context about persecution, and believers fleeing, we should not be surprised that we read here of the Lord gathering His people. So another purpose of His coming is to deliver the oppressed people of God. In fact, Luke 21:28 adds at this point the following words of Jesus, “Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near.” Matthew’s account adds that He will “send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet.” A trumpet blast was used to gather the people of God for war (cf. Rev. 19:11-21). It also signaled the Year of Jubilee, proclaiming liberty for the people of God (Lev. 25:8-10). So while unbelievers will mourn when they see Jesus, the elect of God will rejoice. No wonder Titus 2:13 says, “looking for the blessed hope, even the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.” Oh, what a blessed day that will be!

But who are the “elect” of this verse? McGee believes it is a reference to Israel. Isaiah 45:4 God calls Israel “My elect.” Jews will also be persecuted during the Tribulation, & many will flee as well. The reference in the context to Old Testament prophecies may indeed point to the Old Testament hope of the coming of the Messiah to save & gather Israel. I do believe that during the Great Tribulation, many Jews will turn to Jesus Christ & believe in Him.

However, the first rule of interpretation is to look at the immediate context. The word “elect” is found in vv.20 & 22. I believe in each case it refers to Christian believers, both Jew & Gentile. Furthermore, this is not just a gathering of the elect on earth, but those in “the farthest part of heaven.” This is consistent with other descriptions of our Lord’s coming both for His earthly saints & with His heavenly saints (1 Thess. 3:13; 4:13-18). In fact, in 2 Thess. 2:1 Paul mentions “the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together [*episunagoge*] to Him.”

Conclusion: When Jesus comes again, will you be a part of that great gathering of His saints. Will you rejoice when He comes, or will you mourn when He comes? I call upon you to make sure you are ready for the return of Christ. As we have seen, He may indeed come before the Tribulation. If He does, will you be ready?

Sources: James A. Brooks, *New American Commentary: Mark* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991); William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973); William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 4 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible [CD-ROM]* (Ontario:

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<sup>8</sup> Matt. 24:30 states, “And then the sign of the Son of man will appear in the sky.” But both Mark and Luke leave out the word “sign.” Christ’s brilliant self-manifestation will be the sign or signal that He is about to go forth to meet His people, while they ascend to meet Him in the air.

<sup>9</sup> There are other Scriptures that teach that angels will accompany Jesus, and assist Jesus, when He returns. These include Matt. 13:41, 49; 16:27; 25:31; Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26; 16:22; II Thess. 1:7.

Timnathserah Inc., 1996); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Diligent: Mark* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1987). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

Another approach to this text is “How to Survive & Thrive in the End Times” [esp. for tribulation saints]

I. Trust in the Enabling of the Holy Spirit (v.11)

II. Flee dangerous areas (vv.14-18).

III. Remember the Promises

A. Tribulation will be limited (v.20)

B. Christ Will Intervene to Save Us (vv.26-27)

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