

Endure to the End

Michael J. Nielsen / General

Persecution; Endurance; Perseverance; Evangelism / Mark 13:1–13

That the hearers would be encouraged to continue to endure in their life of faith!

- › Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Again, the promise of Christ is with you. God's got the church in his hands. He is supplying her with life. He is supplying you with life. But then we read our text, our Gospel for this morning and we become alarmed! This alarm goes off after the disciples are admiring the temple and Jesus tells them, these stones will not be left one on top of another. This temple was built to be God's house, but it became something different. It became a place of thievery, a place of worship for something other than God himself and now God is rejecting the temple...it's not pointing them to Jesus! It becomes so rejected that God permitted the Muslims to build their Dome of the Rock on that very site! As Jesus tells them, this temple will be destroyed, the disciples became curious and wanted to know when? Yet, Jesus doesn't tell them! He gives them a list of things that must take place and this list of things is alarming...

It's all front-page news! We hear about wars and rumors of wars! Now it isn't just warring nations, but now its wars within nations, in our country, we encounter it every two years and the political wars that go on. We look to states like Florida and Georgia this year that are becoming uglier by the minute.

In the past we have had other front-page news such as cults with their own leaders claiming to be the messiah. We could see the followers of David Koresh or even Sun Myung Moon in 1982 who testified in Federal court that he had met Moses, Buddah, and Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ had "Requested me to help him in the salvation of the world." He even testified that "I have the possibility of becoming the real Messiah." And now we see famines, earthquakes, and lately fires and hurricanes that make up the news as these things show that the end is in sight, but it's not yet! This front-page news points also to the fact that we live in a broken world, a world broken by sin.

Yet, as Jesus is speaking to the disciples on this day and sharing what first must take place, his immediate context is answering the question of when the temple will be destroyed. And we know that date, AD 70, (but the disciples didn't) but before that, there were false Christs, there

were wars and rumors of wars, there were famines, and earthquakes and many other front-page newsworthy events that cause alarm.

Even before this list...Jesus gives the disciples a warning... "Watch out that no one deceives you!" The same goes for you: it's a warning and it continues throughout our text. Watch out that no one deceives you. No one, many will come and claim to be Jesus or claim to be speaking for Jesus, but there not. Test them with the Word of God. Be strong, be alert, endure! As it's been written, "your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour." It's also been written, "The devil appears at times as an angel of light," in order to deceive you!

"Watch out that no one deceives you!" Dear Church! There's more warnings in our text this morning! As Jesus continues teaching his disciples about what is to come he becomes more specific then ever before. He tells the disciples "Be On Guard." You are going to be handed over to political leaders and will be called upon to give an account and be witnesses to them of the gospel. And in this line of speaking Jesus says, "And the gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations!" Indeed it must! It must be proclaimed to all nations! That dear Church is part of your job.

Proclaim the gospel to those near and far! And start within your homes, your schools and workplaces, your community, and your Church. And the Holy Spirit will give you words to say, yes this is spoken directly to the disciples about what will happen to them as they stand in trial.

And perhaps even in the future, you may be called before political leaders and judges to give an account! Maybe not those types of leaders, but leaders in schools and places of business. The Holy Spirit will give you the Words to speak as you proclaim the Gospel.

Yet, even as the gospel was offensive then, it is still offensive today. The gospel divides. Those who hear the Words of the Gospel are either for it or against it. Families are divided over the gospel. Friendships are ended because of the gospel. The Gospel divides!

And we look at our world today, specifically our culture, our country, our nation. The hatred of the Gospel and anything to do with Jesus and even the morals we get from him grows by the day! And this hatred, to make it much worse is coming into the wider Church, where many church bodies are rejecting the true teachings of the very Word of God and what that word teaches about the Christ! At the and Jesus is very blunt... "You will be hated by all for my names sake."

None of this is comfort. None of this is a surprise either. This has been going on since the time of Christ: false prophets, wars, rumors of wars, natural disaster, and persecution. It isn't comfort that the gospel brings division!

Then the ending words of the text, the ending words of Comfort and peace, "But the one who endures to the end will be saved." Who does the persevering and the enduring? Is it you

yourself, the individual Christian who is hated for the sake of the Gospel? In a way yes, but as I read these 13 verses this morning and have contemplated on them throughout the week, I realize that these words leave me alarmed and afraid, and they also leave me completely helpless. Me endure...not on my own! That's the comfort!

But we, you and I have what does endure! Really we have the one who endures for our sake. And that one is the one teaching the disciples and teaching you and me this morning. That one is Jesus Christ. Think about this for a minute, Jesus was handed over to the councils, he stood before governors and kings. Jesus Christ was persecuted, Jesus Christ was beaten, and Jesus Christ for the sake of his teaching and the hatred of the world against him, sent him to the cross. That's what we read, but it's really God the Father who handed his one and only Son to be plunged into the darkness of judgement. It pleased the Father to do this. The thing is dear Church, Jesus Christ is held responsible for the brokenness of the world, even though he had nothing to do with sin and brokenness. An innocent man, an Innocent GOD died for you! He endured to the End! And you see it!

God the Father saved him. Three days later, Jesus Christ rose from the dead. There, the Father shows once again that He is good to keep His Word. "The one who endures to the end will be saved." This Son, this only Son from the Father, who is the very Word made flesh was faithful to the end and the Father was well-pleased and raised His Son From the Dead.

And because Jesus Christ endured, he is more than a mere fulfillment of His own Word! He is more than a mere example of how we can endure. He is the only hope for sinners mortal. He is your only hope.

As Jesus calls you to be faithful, as He calls you to endure to the end. He gives you the way to do it. He gives you the Spirit. He gave you the Holy Spirit in your Baptism! He continues to give the ability to endure each and every Sunday as you hear the proclamation of the Gospel, as you hear the Words of Absolution, that your sins are forgiven.

This endurance is important, yes, Jesus assures that you are safe with him. Yes, your future is safe because of the deliverance that you have been given by Jesus Christ!

You are saved. You have Christ, but yet the words of Jesus ring true, "See that no one leads you astray." How can you dear Church, the Church that is in the hands of God, decipher what is truth? You do this by receiving, receiving Jesus in His Word and Sacrament. You do this by gathering together around God's Word in Bible Study. You do this by continuing to learn, by being catechized and catechizing others around you with His Very Word! This troubling life of a disciple is a lifelong process, until the Lord calls you out of this veil of tears to await the final resurrection and life eternal in the renewed Creation!

We pray "Come Lord Jesus," but Jesus is clear, the end will not come until the Gospel is proclaimed to all nations. Dear Church, as you endure, you endure in Christ, you endure by Christ, you endure with Christ. Dear Church, as you endure, share the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit will give you the Words to speak at that time. Dear Church, be the Church, be the living organism that you are called to be! Dear Church, be the hands and feet of Jesus in your communities. Dear Church, I encourage you to endure, to endure to the End. For I desire to see you all again, when we sing together in the choir of Saints in the Church Triumphant and in the Church Resurrected. Dear Church you are the Church, and as you are the Church, remain faithful, and be ever grounded in the Rock, the foundation of Jesus Christ.

Even as troubles and trials and signs of the end continue to come, remain steadfast and endure in Christ! For God has the Church, God has you in his hands. It's his Church, and the promise remains, the gates of hell will not prevail against the Church!

In Jesus Name. Amen.

- › Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding, guard your hearts and your minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior. Amen.