

Mark 13 v 1-14

One of the most basic human drives is the search for security. We see it in nations because the state's first responsibility is to provide for the security of its citizens. We see it in our homes and the lengths to which we are prepared to go in order to make them secure against thieves and we see it in individuals. Some invest their savings in the hope that they may find financial security and so precious is our individual psychological security that if it is threatened in any way we tend to react in aggressive and often irrational behaviour. Now this search for security of different kinds is a very natural human desire and the deepest of all forms of this search is the search for personal security. Where is it to be found? We all long for that inward serenity that comes from that inward sense of security. But so many people are seeking it in the wrong place and this is the theme of this passage in Mark's Gospel.

V1 As Jesus came out of the temple, one of his disciples, not sure which one, said 'Look teacher, what massive stones and what magnificent buildings'. They were quite right in their assessment of the temple. Herod's temple, the third which had been erected on this site was a magnificent complex of courts and colonnades and balconies and buildings and galleries of every description. A mountain of white marble decorated with gold it dominated the Kidron gorge as an object of dazzling beauty. Nevertheless although their statement was correct it betrayed a false security. Perhaps they had been disturbed in the previous week with the growing opposition which the religious authorities were manifesting towards Jesus. Perhaps they had been disturbed by Jesus' own ominous predictions about his sufferings and death and about God's coming judgement upon the nation of Israel. Perhaps they were now filled with foreboding about the future and even unconsciously were trying to compensate for it and for their own insecurity. So they pointed to the massive solidity of Herod's temple. You can hear the national pride in their voice and Jesus was to undermine their false sense of security. His argument is that there is no ultimate security on earth. So his first point is that there is no security in the Jewish order.

V2 Do you see all these great buildings? But I tell you there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down. It's very hard for us to begin to understand the dismay that the disciples would have felt in those words of Jesus.

Because the temple in Jerusalem was the dwelling place of Jahweh. It was His earthly footstool as He reigned in heaven. It was the symbol of Israel's holiness as the special people of God and it was the focus of national pride and national unity and identity. True its predecessors had been destroyed – Solomon's temple had been destroyed in the 6th century BC and its successor, Zerubbabel's temple had been desecrated in the 2nd century BC. But the disciples must have been asking in their minds 'were these appalling tragedies to be repeated a third time'. Besides Jesus was known to love the temple. He often visited it. He had only cleansed it from commercialisation a few days previously. He called it God's house and a house of prayer. How then could he sound like an old testament prophet of doom and declare that it was going to be demolished and imply moreover that the Jewish dispensation was going to pass away. That if there was going to be no more temple there would be no more sacrifices, no more priesthood. You can't begin to understand the bewilderment, the confusion, the dismay which the disciples must have felt when Jesus announced the demolition of the temple. There is no security in the Jewish order. It's passed away.

Secondly, there's no security in the world order. V 3-8. From the time of v 2 when they were in the city we read they went out of the city, down into the Kidron valley and up to the Mount of Olives. During this walk they were probably in a state of shock and only when they were sitting on the hill overlooking the city and enjoying the view of the temple did 4 of them pluck up their courage and ask Jesus their question v 4. **When will these things happen and what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled** or as Matthew understood the question, **What will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age.** So they distinguish between the demolition of the temple and the sign of the end of the age and his return. It seems likely that when they asked when the former would take place and the establishment of the latter, they probably thought that the gap between these two would be short and Jesus was coming very soon after the destruction of the temple. If so, then Jesus quickly disabused them. He went on immediately to say take heed that nobody deceives you since many will come in my name and say I am He, I am the messiah but deceivers. Don't believe them, the end is not yet in sight. What he does go on to say that the destruction of the temple would be followed by tragedy on the wider world scene.

v 7 there will be wars and rumours of wars. Don't be alarmed, don't be surprised. Such things must happen. They are an inevitable historical development but the end is still to come. v8 nation will rise against nation. In contrast to the prophetic vision in Micah and Isaiah who said that nation will not lift up sword against nation. On the contrary Jesus said nation will rise against nation and in addition there will be earthquakes in various places and famines. In other words there was to be no peace and no security either in human society or in the natural world. The kind of peace and security that had been promised in the Old Testament for the Messianic age. Instead Jesus said there would be a period of great violence and great upheaval both in the political arena, wars and rumours of wars and in the natural world – earthquakes and famines. No security in the Jewish order, no security in the world order.

Thirdly, no security in the Christian order. v 9-13. v9 You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. Even you my disciples will not be immune to the violence that is going to engulf both the Jewish nation and the world. They, the unspecified enemies of the gospel, will deliver you up and you will be beaten in the synagogues and you will stand before rulers to bear testimony before them. Thus opposition to the gospel will be turned into an occasion for witness to the gospel. v10 the good news must be preached to all the nations. Moreover when you are dragged before rulers, there is no need to be anxious, the Holy Spirit will give you the words to speak, not only in your own defence but in your witness to me. Nevertheless their sufferings will be very painful v 12 and v13 – brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. All men will hate you because of me but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. We don't hear enough about or think enough about this strand of the teaching of Jesus. The good news that unites also divides. The good news that brings peace and reconciliation in the Christian community also promotes conflict and in consequence the evangelising church has always been in history the suffering church. As with Jesus, the suffering servant of the Lord, so with His people. Service and suffering, evangelism and opposition, mission and passion, witness and martyrdom go together. Of course in the fellowship there is wonderful love and joy and peace but in the world there is tribulation.

Now these things that Jesus foretold we have seen plenty of not only in past centuries but in this young century – 9/11, Covid, environmental disasters. Tonga, Russia invasion of Ukraine. We have seen Christians persecuted in Iran, Iraq and Syria and clamped down of dissidents in Hong Kong and Russia. All these are a sombre picture of world history that Jesus painted. As his prophetic eyes looked into the future he saw the destruction of the temple, the upheaval of the world and society and nature and the persecution of the church. He passes in quick review the Jewish order, the world order and the Christian order and he promises no peace or safety such as we crave to experience but only conflict, violence and calamity. No stone will be left in the temple, nation will rise against nation in the world and brother will rise against brother in the church.

Such a pessimistic picture at the beginning of 2022. Is there not any hope? Well when you first read this passage, you might think there is really no hope that Jesus hopes. Certainly there is no security for those who seek it in bricks and mortar. For those who look around in their church, their home or their lives and say ‘Look teacher, what massive stones, what magnificent buildings’. We’re safe as houses. And he replied that houses aren’t safe. But nevertheless, even in this dark passage. Each of its three successive paragraphs contains or implies a bright ray of hope.

Firstly, Jesus who foretold the destruction of the temple also said in the following chapter, ‘Destroy this temple and in 3 days I will raise it again’. The apostle John tells us he was referring to his body – both his resurrection body and his mystical body (the church). The destruction of the temple would not terminate the presence of God among his people but rather facilitate it. It would no longer be localised in a building but universalised wherever His people are. The security of the people of God is not in buildings it is in the presence of God wherever they are.

Secondly, the Jesus who foretold political or national upheaval or natural disasters referred to these as the beginning of the birth pangs. V8 last phrase ‘this is but the beginning of the sufferings’ could be translated as ‘this is the beginning of the birth pangs’. The Good News bible translates it ‘these are like the first pains of childbirth’. In other words they indicate the new order is about to be born. Paul Romans 8 v 22 when he says the universe is groaning in

travail waiting to bring forth the new heaven and the new earth. So we are to see the spasms of society and the groans of nature as labour pains which herald the birth of the new universe which there will be no more war or famine or earthquake or anything to bring sorrow or pain.

Thirdly Jesus who warned his people that they would be hated, arrested, tried, condemned, beaten and even killed added he who endures to the end will be saved. Not delivered from danger but will be given a share in the final salvation which is God's new order about to be born. The whole new testament teaches that suffering with Christ is the path to glory.

Jesus warned in this passage that the whole period elapsing between his first and second comings would be a period of violent conflict. Beginning with the destruction of the temple and Jewish nationalism, continuing with wars, earthquakes and famines in the world and the persecution of the church which takes the gospel to the nations. Again none of these things are a surprise to us. Jesus offers no grounds for easy optimism. He gives us no grounds for dreaming dreams of an earthly utopia but on the other hand Jesus offers no grounds for dark pessimism either. Because if you take the whole of his teaching, you will remember that although there are going to be wars and rumours of wars, he calls us to be peacemakers. And although there is going to be famine, he tells us to feed the hungry and although there is earthquake he tells us to take the homeless into our homes. So Jesus gives us no grounds for a facile optimism or a vision of Utopia on the one hand or for a dark pessimism on the other. What he gives us is a new perspective from which to view the sufferings of the present time. Where is your security? All of us have this inward urge to find security somewhere but where are you looking for it. Where do you hope to find it? Have you got some pet idol at which you are saying 'Look teacher, look at these magnificent stones'. In other words are you trying to find security in your home or in your family or in your money or your possessions. There is a temptation to which all of us are exposed to lay up treasure for ourselves on earth, to make ourselves secure, to barricade ourselves into some bastion or to flee away to some refuge where we think calamity will never find us. That's not the way of Jesus. His way is to be ready for sufferings. It is not to be alarmed by calamities but it is to see these sufferings and calamities as the signs of the end, the pledges of a new order and even labour pains promising the birth of the final universe.

So let's find our security in the only place where we can find it. It's in Christ Himself which he promises to consummate when He comes again. There and there only is full and final security