

“The End”

(St. Mark 13:1-13 & one of its parallels St. Matthew 24:1-14)

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Introduction: The Tremendous Investment in Jerusalem

- A. How does one even begin to describe the war-torn conditions of the Middle East?
- B. And no single city has received more attention than Jerusalem, the city of David.
- C. It is a city that has been laid claim to by Islam, Judaism and Christianity, the so-called “three great, monotheistic faith traditions.”
- D. All of them have amazing connections to Jerusalem:
 - 1. The Islamic Dome of the Rock is the second most holy site for Muslims next to Mecca itself.
 - 2. Judaism holds also to this site as sacred through Solomon’s temple, destroyed and rebuilt two times, but then destroyed a third time. Though to this day its remnant, the great Wailing Wall, is the site of pilgrimage and prayer.
 - 3. Christianity considers the land “holy” to say the least. Right outside the city gates the Lord Jesus Christ was crucified and indeed it was there that he was buried and rose (John 19:41). The

very first Christian congregation was in the city of Jerusalem!

Part I: Christianity Severely Divided on the Question of Jerusalem:

- A. One side is the traditional view of Jerusalem which we advocate as Lutheran Christians:
 - 1. Mark 13 and Matthew 24 describe the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman army in A.D. 70.
 - 2. We know from Josephus – the great Jewish historian – that the legions of Emperor Vespasian and his son Titus laid siege to the city from A.D. 66 to 70 and that Jerusalem finally fell on August 10th in A.D. 70.
 - 3. That is, after Jesus was crucified and raised in A.D. 30, the Lord gave the Israelites an entire generation -- another 40 years of mercy -- before the end came upon Jerusalem.
 - 4. Jesus’ prediction about the end of Jerusalem is recorded in Mark 13:2 as our Lord was referring to the buildings within the city of Jerusalem:

“And Jesus said to him, ‘Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.’”

5. In this short passage, Jesus predicted the destruction of Jerusalem.
6. The disciples were understandably alarmed and so they asked him when this was going to happen and what sign would accompany the destruction (Mark 13:4).
7. The traditional view rightly holds that the words “the end” (mentioned in Mark 13:7, 13 and Matthew 24:6, 14) refer to different events in the Bible, depending on the context. It may refer to the final Day of Judgment when Christ comes again in glory, but it may also refer to the day when the Assyrians destroyed Israel in 722 B.C. or when the Babylonians carried Judah into exile in 587 B.C. and destroyed Jerusalem, etc. In Mark and Matthew, it refers to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. These were days of God’s coming in the sense of a great outpouring of God’s judgment upon Jerusalem.
8. The present earthly Jerusalem is no longer what we long for.
 - a. To understand this consider how Abraham is called your “father” (Romans 4:16) not on the basis of your being connected to Jerusalem in nationality, but on the basis of having the same faith in Christ. In the same way, the New Jerusalem we long for is not in the Middle East!

- b. The Jerusalem we long for is infinitely different:

Revelation 3:12: *“The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name.”*

Revelation 21:2: *“And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.”*

Revelation 21:10: *“And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God.”*

- c. Furthermore, when God’s Word teaches that “all Israel will be saved” (Romans 11:26), “all Israel” is not a reference to national, political Israel which was re-established as a nation in 1948, but “all Israel” has a spiritual meaning: ***all people – Jews and Gentiles – who have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ!***

Romans 9:8: *“This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.”*

- d. YOU are a child of the promise of the Gospel!
YOU are a citizen of the spiritual Israel of faith
in Jesus Christ! YOUR inheritance is the New
Jerusalem that will come down from heaven
when the Lord comes again in glory!

Part II: The Other View Produces Great Danger, Hatred & Fear

- A. The other view held by so-called “prophecy” believers are led by networks and teachers like the following: TBN, Pat Robertson’s Christian Broadcasting Network, Hal Lindsey, Jack Van Impe, John Hagee, Dave Hunt, Grant Jeffrey, Tim LaHaye, and David Jeremiah.
- B. These Christian leaders lead gigantic evangelical ministries, have sold millions of books, and lead substantial media networks. Millions of American Christians have swallowed their teachings hook, line, and sinker.
- C. The long and short of their teaching is this: The earthly national Jerusalem must come into increasing political prominence since these teachers view the teachings just covered not in a spiritual sense, but in a wooden, literalistic sense. The words “all Israel will be saved” is applied to the modern nation of Israel and all national Jews. The Jews will be given a second chance to accept the Gospel of Christ. In order for this to happen, they

say that Israel must be fully restored politically and geographically! Their view might seem tame enough, but let’s take a closer look:

1. They believe that the sections of Mark 13 and Matthew 24 we’ve considered are NOT descriptions of 1st century events, but that these references are about events **yet to come**.
2. These teachers try hard to convince us that natural catastrophes, weather conditions, and political crises are more serious today than ever before. History, however, does not sustain their claim. Throughout history, whenever major wars, or plagues, or natural catastrophes occurred, fear-mongers have always been there predicting the end of the world. This is a fact. In actuality, there have been cycles of history that make our current cycle look like a day on the beach. For example, during the decade-long “war on terror” in Iraq and Afghanistan, over 6600 American troops have been killed in war. History records, however, that when the Romans invaded Jerusalem that the temple – just the temple – was deluged with the blood of 8,500 victims.
3. However, because these “prophecy” teachers insist that the events we’ve considered in Mark 13 and Matthew 24 are still in the future, they INSIST that what Jesus is here describing is actually a FUTURE

GREAT WAR that will eventually lead to glorious blessings for Israel. Many of these teachers fuel an apocalyptic fervor with modern predictions of war between America and Israel on one side and radical Islam on the other...War World III MUST occur in their sensational scenarios in order to fulfill God's Word (as they understand "prophetic fulfillment"). The current crisis in Gaza between Israel and the Palestinians, esp. in light of other end-of-the-world predictions associated with 2012 is another chance for many of these teachers to take advantage of an anxious public ready to buy millions more of their books.

4. But consider the real problem: while using the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, many of these teachers perpetuate fear, war, dread, and hatred. Brothers and sisters in Christ, what these teachers present is dangerous and shameful. It is also an assault on the Gospel of Christ. Why? Because it takes our eyes off the wonderful victory, hope and love that Christ has won for us and desires for us to live in -- for the rest of our lives -- until the New Jerusalem comes!

Part III: What is the Actual State of Affairs?

- A. What I'm saying does not deny that we are most certainly threatened by Islamic fundamentalists and radicals, but understand that we are *also* threatened by Christian fundamentalists and radicals. The radical Christian version of the rapture – not the ancient understanding we hold to – is just as dangerous as Islamic Jihad. The problem is when our focus is shifted from Christ to the "prophetic" extremes that evoke fear over faith.
- B. But what does this kind of fear do? It turns everything upside down. What is to be the genuinely faithful reaction of the Christian who is allowed to live in the midst of those of different religions and worldviews? Are we to recoil, load up on weapons and ammunition as we retreat into either monasteries or fortresses? No! We are to rejoice in the great opportunity we are given by God to be His witnesses and to share His love.
- C. The Lord does NOT want you to live in fear. He desires you live in FAITH, HOPE and LOVE!
- D. Don't worry about tomorrow the Lord says in Matthew chapter 6, and don't take your eyes off the New Jerusalem that is your eternal home yet to come!
- E. Even this earth will be restored, so that we do not have to live in FEAR about it either, even as we strive to live as good stewards who care for it today.
- F. But our vision is not in a future war on earth, but on the war of wars that has already occurred. The war

that Christ your Savior fought for you when He bore your sin and rescued you from eternal death.

- G. The war that was won through His shed blood and the victory guaranteed through His resurrection gives you the victory...so there is no reason to live in fear in face of the false teachings that surround us.

1st Corinthians 15:56-58: *“The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.”*

- H. There are so many factors – unfortunately even in some corners of Christianity – that would fill you with anxiety, fear and dread, but this is not the life of God. Instead Christ says to you, “Do not fear, I have won life for you that will never end; even death is no longer cause for fear. Know that I hold you, I hold this earth, I hold the perfect time when the New Jerusalem will be given, so do not fear, do not pursue war, but pursue Me, my Word, my Sacrament, my love and know this: I love you. I will therefore enfold you in my arms, fill you with My Spirit, keep you in my protection and lead you in the power of My Name...the Kingdom of God is in your midst (Luke 17) and my Kingdom is not of this

world (John 18)...so keep your eyes not on the old Jerusalem, but on the New Jerusalem and love your neighbor as yourself be they atheist, Jew, Muslim...no matter, for I have died for all and you are my ambassador to all...and ***‘the one who endures to the end will be saved.’***”