

In the 1988 Olympics, the world assumed that the United States would be victorious in the men's 400-meter relay. They simply were the best. The gun cracked and they were off and running. After the last curve the **unthinkable** happened. The United States was ahead by 10 meters with no real competition in sight. And then, with victory in their grasp, it happened. They dropped the baton. The thousands in the stands gasped in disbelief. The United States team sleek, muscular, and fast as leopards, lost the race. Why? Someone dropped the baton. **YES, THE UNTHINKABLE HAPPENED!!**

I would hate for us as a church to be the people who dropped the baton. What is God calling us to be and to do as God's people in this time and this place? It's not a question of resources but a question of FAITH. **For if we drop the baton while doing God's work, the worst can happen.**

The worst happened at the age of 20, for Art Berg. Everything was going right. He was a gifted athlete and had started his own tennis court construction company. And he was engaged to a beautiful woman. Leaving California one Christmas eve, he was headed to Utah with a friend. He was going to meet his fiancée and complete their wedding plans. However, during the long drive, he fell asleep while at the wheel. His car hit an abutment and rolled down a hill. He was ejected from the car and found himself laying on the desert with a broken neck. He was paralyzed from the chest down. He completely lost the use of his legs and arms. The doctors told him he would never work again. They concluded that he could never play sports again and would be dependent on others the rest of his life. One even suggested he forget getting married.

Art Berg was really afraid. It was the darkest moment in his life. *The "end times" were upon him.* In the midst of his peril his mother came and whispered a few words in his ear. *"Art, while the difficult takes time, the impossible takes a little longer."* In other words, "don't panic!" Suddenly, Art's darkness was filled with a light of hope. That was eleven years ago. Today Art Berg is president of his own company, a professional speaker and author. He has gained back some of the use of his arms and legs and can now drive. He travels across the country sharing his message, *"that the impossible just takes a little longer."* Art married his fiancée and they have two children. He has even returned to the world of sports, swimming and scuba diving. In 1993 Art was the first quadriplegic to race 32 miles in a marathon, all because he didn't panic—**HE TRUSTED THAT EVEN WITH THE IMPOSSIBLE—THE UNTHINKABLE IS POSSIBLE.**

There are many unthinkable events recorded in history. There are some recorded in the Bible. One of them is recorded in today's lesson from Mark's Gospel.

As Jesus was leaving the temple at Jerusalem, one of his disciples said to him, ***"Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!"***

And they were magnificent buildings. The historian Josephus said that much of the exterior of the temple at Jerusalem, which was constructed under Herod the Great, was covered with gold that reflected the fiery rays of the sun. Moreover, he said that, from a distance, the temple appeared like a mountain covered with snow. This was probably because those parts that were not covered with gold were made of white stone.

And the temple was enormous. The outer court was nearly a quarter of a mile long and three football fields across. It was bordered by walls. On top of those walls were magnificent, covered cloisters or walkways, with richly carved wooden ceilings.

The temple was a huge undertaking which required an enormous amount of labor and money. It was said to be larger and more beautiful than the temple that Solomon built. It was quite a sight for all to behold--an architectural wonder of the ancient world.

As the disciples stared with wonder at this magnificent edifice, Jesus brought them back to earth as he said, ***"Do you see all these great buildings? Not one stone here will be left on another; everyone will be thrown down."***

What was he saying--that their precious temple would be destroyed? **That was UNTHINKABLE to the disciples.**

The temple represented God. *The temple represented their identity as God's people.* Yet Jesus told them that one day it would lie in ruins. And what he predicted came true, within the lifetime of some of them. Herod's temple, a magnificent structure of awesome proportions, four years after its completion was totally destroyed and wiped from the face of the earth. **That was in 70 A.D., approximately 40 years after Christ's death.**

In our lesson for today Jesus addresses the forthcoming destruction of the temple and then uses this opportunity to talk with his disciples about the "END OF TIME." This is the content of Mark 13, one of the so-called apocalyptic chapters in the Bible, a chapter that has been used to strike fear in many hearts. *The end of time is still a subject of speculation in many Christian churches, and many pastors and teachers are still using it to keep their fearful congregations in line.*

Many don't want to look at this challenging subject of life—THE END OF TIME. *But looking at it can sometimes bring a better understanding of the full cycle of life itself.*

I believe there are (3) things Jesus said about THE END OF TIME that could be helpful to us.

THE FIRST CONCERNS "FALSE TEACHERS." Jesus said to them: **"Watch out that no one deceives you. Many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and will deceive many . . ."**

Yes, during Biblical times there were many false teachers who wanted the "lime-light" that Jesus had, so they distorted his WORD to try and get it. Jesus witnessed them at work so he warned folk as he taught, *"Beware of false prophets, who are wolves in sheep's clothing. Many who follow our teachings will think they are pleasing to God but will be rejected because they have not done His will."* Matt. 7:21-23.

And example of this in the Bible is Eve. Yes, Eve sinned because she was beguiled or deceived. God said she would die if she ate, but Satan tricked her with the false doctrine that she would not die but would become like God. Eve was not a hypocrite or moral troublemaker, nor did she deny God's existence. She was deceived by a false teacher. Was there no serious consequence in this? Think of all the horrible problems that came into the world - even into your life and mine - as a result of this one act. BECAUSE OF EVE!!!

Surely this illustrates the serious problems that false teaching can cause.

Also you all remember David Koresh of Branch Davidian who led a cult that ended in the death of approx. 79 people. They all died because of false teachings. False teachings that left them in FEAR at the End. Enough FEAR that they were willing to take their life instead of face the TRUTH...the TRUTH that God loved them just the way they were!!

Koresh left people with FEARING GOD, instead of LOVING HIM... That's quite different than the faith that Jesus instills in his followers. In fact, the constant WARNING of Jesus is, **"Don't be afraid."** **But that's the first thing Jesus warns us about in Mark 13—is being led astray by false teachers.**

THE 2ND THING JESUS WARNED HIS DISCIPLES AGAINST WAS "MISINTERPRETING EVENTS" SUCH AS WARS AND NATURAL DISASTERS AS SIGNS THAT THE END IS AT HAND.

He says, *"When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come . . ."*

MANY ARE GRUMBLING THAT THE END IS AT HAND. Look around you. Temperature changes, fires, earth quakes, tornadoes, hurricanes, and humans turning against humans. All of these and more are becoming common events-to many. YES, there always have been natural disasters and there will always be such disasters. Fortunately, particularly in this country, we are better protected against such disasters than any generation that's ever lived. We have never experienced disasters in the scope of those experienced by other nations and other generations.

For example, on July 5, 1201 in Egypt and Syria, the deadliest earthquake in recorded history struck. This disaster rocked the eastern Mediterranean and killed over 1.1 million people. Nearly every city in the near east felt the effects

of this quake. Then there was the bubonic plague or “Black Death.” It killed almost 33 percent of the entire population of Europe when it struck between 1347 and 1350. It also affected millions in Asia and North Africa.

There have even been flu epidemics through the centuries that have killed millions of persons. **Each time a great tragedy has occurred, people have thrown up their hands and said, “This is it! This is the end of the world.” DO YOU THINK MANY BELIEVED THAT THE OUR EXPERIENCE OF “COVID 19” WAS GOING TO BE THE END?**

Will, for most, Covid wasn’t the end of time. Jesus warned his disciples against misinterpreting contemporary events such as wars and natural disasters as indicators that the end is at hand. Don’t panic, friends. This world may be around for many more centuries or even millennia.

But here’s the 3rd WARNING OF JESUS’ AND MOST IMPORTANT THING YOU NEED TO KNOW.
Jesus made it very clear that nobody knows when the end of time will be. Jesus said even he didn’t know.

We read in verse 32 of Mark, **“But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”** It might be tomorrow. It might be 10,000 years from now. Nobody knows! Foolish people keep setting dates, but so far they’ve been totally wrong. If you run into somebody determined to announce how soon the end will come, ask him if he thinks he is smarter than Jesus, for Jesus said **even he** didn’t know when it would be. How much more definitive can you be than that?

In a classic *Peanuts* cartoon Linus and Lucy are standing at a window watching it rain. Lucy says to Linus, “Look at it rain! What if the whole earth floods?” Linus answers: “It won’t! God promised Noah in Genesis Chapter 9 He would never flood the world again; the sign of this promise is the rainbow. Lucy smiles and replies, **“Linus, you’ve taken a great load off my mind.”** To which Linus responds, **“Sound theology has a way of doing that.”**

Jesus makes it very clear: regardless of what certain popular books and movies infer, it might be thousands or even millions of years before the end comes. Nobody knows--neither scientists, theologians nor quack preachers on radio or television.

Here’s what I want you to remember: Life is unpredictable. Terrible things will always happen in this world. I don’t say that to you so that you will be afraid. Exactly the opposite is true. I want you to know that regardless of what comes, God will never leave you nor forsake you. **Even if the entire world should pass away, God will still be with you.**

It is said that during the making of the classic film *Ben Hur*, actor Charlton Heston had to learn how to drive a chariot. It was part of a race scene that was probably the most exciting one that had ever been filmed up to that time. After many weeks of chariot lessons Heston told the director, **“I think I can drive the chariot all right but I’m not at all sure I can actually win the race”.** The director, responded, **“You just stay in the race and I’ll make sure you win.”**

That’s Christ message to us in every troubled time: “You just stay in the race and I’ll make sure you win.”

Don’t let false teachers fill your mind with needless anxiety.

No one knows what the future holds, **but we know Who holds OUR FUTURE.**

God holds the future and we are God’s children—**SO, DO NOT BE AFRAID OF WHAT IS YET TO COME!!**

FOR NO MATTER WHAT YOU MUST ENDURE THROUGHOUT THE CHALLENGES OF LIFE...GOD PROMISES WHEN YOU REACH THEN END...” YOU WILL WIN THE RACE.”

AMEN.