

## Olivet Discourse, Part Two

Mark 13:9–13

We are in the Olivet Discourse found in Mark 13, the prophetic chapter of the Gospel. Last week we saw Jesus prophesy the destruction of the temple, which was an act of judgment against self-righteous, disobedient, unbelieving religious leaders, **and** the end of the sacrificial system. The gospel is fulfilled in Christ's sacrificial, atoning death; thus the temple is no longer needed. Further, believers are now the temple of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus then begins talking about things that are to come to his followers. He doesn't point to calendar dates, but prepares us for costly discipleship. Internal threats will come from false teachers and seducing posers. There will be external threats from governments and natural disasters from a cursed creation groaning for the New Creation. In light of this he gives two commands:

1) Do not be led astray. 2) Do not be alarmed. We set ourselves up to obey these commands by keeping our eyes fixed on King Jesus. Set your minds on things above where Christ is seated — he is in his session; he is ruling and reigning over all things.<sup>1</sup> The fullness of his reign will be ushered in at the New Creation and continue forever. Until then, we live under threat from the world's systematic rebellion against the rule and reign of Christ Jesus. That brings us to the next description of persecution and the explanation of why God ordains it. So let's read the text.

**Mark 13:3–13** — <sup>3</sup>And as he sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately, <sup>4</sup>“Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?” <sup>5</sup>And Jesus began to say to them, “See that no one leads you astray. <sup>6</sup>Many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am he!’ and they will lead many astray. <sup>7</sup>And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. This must take place, but the end is not yet. <sup>8</sup>For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. These are but the beginning of the birth pains.

<sup>9</sup>“But be on your guard. For they will deliver you over to councils, and you will be beaten in synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them. <sup>10</sup>And the gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations. <sup>11</sup>And when they bring you to trial and deliver you over, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit. <sup>12</sup>And brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death. <sup>13</sup>And you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

### PRAY

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<sup>1</sup> Colossians 3:1–3

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**Be on guard**, begins **v 9**. Against what? Against easy living, name-it, claim-it nonsense. Don't think that coming to Christ is about having your *best life now* or comfort and security. Be clear in your mind: persecution and adversity are not rare exceptions for believers; they are the norm. All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.<sup>2</sup> Let's remember that he is speaking to 1<sup>st</sup> Century followers. This isn't strictly a prophecy about something way off thousands of years down the road. This is real instruction for those to whom he is speaking at that time. They endured every threat recorded right through the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D.

So does this apply to us today? As we see from other teachings of Jesus, and the teachings of the apostles who laid the foundation of the church, these things mark the last days. The last days are the biblical epoch ushered in by Jesus's victorious resurrection. As they lived in the last days, so we do.

Jesus identifies three sources of persecution: **1) religious leaders**, **2) government rulers** — both in **v 9** — and, **3) (perhaps the most bitter source) one's own family**, in **v 12**. The threat from those three sources reveal the catastrophe that came upon all of creation when Adam and Eve rebelled against God in **Genesis 3**. God established three domains of authority: **Marriage**, and by extension, the family; **human government** to execute justice and punish evil doers; and **The Church**. When sin entered the world, it was not just individual humans that were impacted by it. That is certainly true, for the wages of sin is death. But the magnitude of corruption has echoed through the whole of creation, the **cosmos**, and all the institutions and entities that are established. Let's look at those three domains of authority in the order that Jesus gives them.

**v 9** — **They** will deliver you over to councils, and you will be beaten in the synagogues. The "they" referenced are the religious leaders. Those who were to know God, walk in humble obedience to him, and shepherd his people to advance God's kingdom have come to advance their own kingdom. They love their profitable and respected positions. They love being well-thought-of. They seek the applause of men rather than the approval of God. Now that the kingdom of Christ is being ushered in and the doctrine of being made right with God through faith alone is recovered and revealed in Christ, they will fight Christ and his followers tooth and nail. Obedience to Christ smashes their workarounds of God's law. They can't have that. Christ's claim that people are made righteous only through him proves they have none of their own. They will do anything to protect their pride and reputations.

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<sup>2</sup> 2 Timothy 3:12

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As it was in the 1st century, it is now. You can find tons of “churches” that reject the authority of God’s word, and compromise with the world’s self-righteous standards. They assail gospel-believing churches and their members as being on the wrong side of history and even accuse them of being anti-God. This reflects the whole of church history. The reformation was about the recovery of the Gospel from those who trusted their own works to gain merit before God. In more recent history, 19<sup>th</sup> century theologians began casting doubt, on the truth of God’s word in order to gain favor with western intellectuals who rejected God. In World War II, churches in Germany, abandoned both the gospel and their responsibility to proclaim it in order to get along with the Nazi regime. In our day most main line denominations, I’ve simply jettisoned biblical teaching in order to be embraced by sexual revolutionaries. Get this clear in your mind: As there are false teachers and false christs, there will be false church leaders who will persecute and beat you for proclaiming and obeying the Gospel.

**Next: The domain of human government, v 9b** — This is the least surprising of the three domains. The government structures of the world are determined to resist the rule, and reign of Christ, because it threatens their rule, and reign. Since the first century, believers have been told, at threat of their lives, they must acknowledge that Caesar is lord. Caesar does not tolerate other rulers. We have seen an encroaching tyranny in our own country concerning God’s people gathering for worship on the Lord’s day as scripture commands when such gathering is not approved by the state. In Canada some pastors have been jailed for reading Romans 1 out loud. Sin’s corruption is most easily seen in the rebellion of human government against God’s kingdom. Be prepared for this.

**The domain of the family, v 12** — here is perhaps the most painful persecution. It is persecution from those, perhaps, that you gave birth to. Or, perhaps those who gave birth to you. The most basic unit of human existence, designed for communion with God and human flourishing is in rebellion against the one who created it. All the pride and self-righteousness of false religious leaders and rebellious governments resides in every human heart, unless they are given a new heart by Christ. Since faith in Christ is not established through family genetics, but in individuals turning to faith in Christ, those who will not turn will be as offended by the claims of Christ’s rule and reign espoused by their own flesh and blood as the government or any false religious leader is.

Again, we see this plainly in our own day, in the destructive advance of the progressive sexual revolution. Parents who will not share in the delusion that their biological son is a woman — those parents will be shamed. In certain states their children will be taken away from them. In the midst of this moral insanity believers must not be led astray. We must hold fast to the word of God and the

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gospel it proclaims. We must do it because Christ calls us to do it. And we must do it because it is the only hope for those who seek to destroy both his truth and those who proclaim it.

We live in a difficult and hard day. I cannot imagine a greater heartache than dealing with a father, a sister, or child, who is an utter rebellion against everything that God says — and then demands you embrace the rebellion. If you don't, you will be shamed, cut off, perhaps denied access to grandchildren... In that day embrace loyalty to Christ, his word, and his Church. We must believe that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life.<sup>3</sup> His word is fixed forever in the heavens. We cannot change it, even for the sake of those we love most. If we did, we would assure that those we love would end up in the eternal condemnation of a sinner's hell. Decide now, before the storm hits, that your loyalty is not first to your family, but to your God who calls you to proclaim his Gospel. That does not mean that we are unkind or mean spirited. But it does mean we cannot compromise God's eternal word. Church, we must prepare to support and encourage one another in this regard. Do not be led astray.

Now, having listed those 3 sources of persecution, Jesus makes a summary statement, as though those three domains were not enough. **V 13** — everyone will hate you. He's speaking of everyone outside of Christ — that is, the world arrayed against the rule and reign of Christ. It is no surprise that as Christ emerges from the grave, his enemies will turn on everything they've got to defeat him again.

**What do we do in the face of such hateful persecution?** Answer: Be of good cheer! That may sound an odd thing to say, but Christ said to be of good cheer because has overcome the world!<sup>4</sup> Persecution is not wasted. None of it is wasted. There is a purpose behind what God brings into your life, and it is for his glory and your eternal reward. We see in **vv 9 & 10** that the hating world will unjustly use the levers of power to punish you, but what they mean for evil Christ ordains for eternal good. As they drag you through unjust trials, proclaim the gospel of Christ! When you end up before government leaders, tell of salvation in Christ until every nation knows Jesus is Lord.

This is happening for Christ's sake, and the advance of the Gospel. Do not be anxious! Note that God has the capacity to put you in places where people will listen. He will put in people the desire to hunger to hear the Gospel. Pray for this! Look for it. Obey when God puts you there.

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<sup>3</sup> John 14:6

<sup>4</sup> John 16:33

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Persecution is not meaningless. God has ordained it and infused it with eternal value. Believers are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.<sup>5</sup> This is what we are made for: to proclaim his excellencies! God created us for his glory that we may declare his wonderful works to the ends of the Earth. If anyone follows Christ they must take up the instrument of their death to the world, just as he did, and follow him — through the agony of prayer for the Father's will, through courts of false accusations, and through the unjust systems of a rebellious world. The sinless Savior went to a sinner's cross and purchased you by his blood. Tender feet and soft uncalloused hands must be strengthened for meaningful, useful service. The Lamb of God is worthy of this. There is no other name worthy of glory. Do not be surprised at this.

Will any of this be easy? These warnings and commands of Christ suggest that it won't be. It will take be real spiritual work. We may be deprived of liberty or life itself. But what is lost in this short life is not worthy to be compared to what he gives in eternal abundant life. Whatever we lose in terms of houses, land, family rejection, he repays 100-fold in his kingdom.<sup>6</sup> He is a debtor to no one.

Beloved, this is not a fantasy horror story to scare you straight. These commands and prophecies are from the mouth of Jesus as he prepares to go to the cross. They beat him and killed him. As the master, so shall the servant be. But do not fear: In the midst of it he equips us for counter-cultural obedience. He does not leave us without help. As John 14 tells us, he sends the Holy Spirit to live inside of us and strengthen us for the task. We see the specific work of the Spirit in v 11 — And when they bring you to trial and deliver you over, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit. God will supernaturally strengthen us through his eternal Spirit. He may bring to mind Scripture you have read and memorized. He will uphold and sustain you with resurrection power enabling you to stare down even death itself. I'm not making this up. This is the testimony of God's word and we see it throughout the Scriptures. Perhaps this afternoon you would be refreshed and have your faith bolstered by reading the roll call of the faithful in Hebrews 11.

Take it to heart to glorify God. Push out anything and everything that competes with the pursuit of the glory of God in your affections and our protections (what we value and sacrifice for). Where we are

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<sup>5</sup> 1 Peter 2:9

<sup>6</sup> Mark 10:29–30

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resistant to do this we must pray for help life-giving power that destroys life-stealing idols. This is how we endure to the end.

We might imagine that what is happening in the world's revolt against God, his word, and his Son, is new. There is a sense that God's truth is going to be run off the rails and replaced with new emerging truth. But none of this is new. It is as old as, "Did God say," in Genesis 3. Our assignment is this: Hold, proclaim, and contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.<sup>7</sup> Even if it becomes a capital offense, we proclaim the Gospel and contend for it because ***it is true***. It is the only hope for the world. It is the only hope for those who would assault and seek to destroy it. It is the only hope for religious leaders who have abandoned it in favor of more popular heresies. It is the only hope for those who would lead governments. It is the only hope for our family members who may say, "Don't push that stuff down my throat." It is the only hope for sons and daughters and grandsons and granddaughters who imagine themselves to be their own creators and mutilate their bodies and destroy their souls. It is not our version of truth, as though we should keep it to ourselves and let others embrace whatever construct they choose. It is eternal, unchanging truth: Jesus saves sinners. Jesus saves sinners. Believe this. Stand on it. Contend for it, though the cost in this life be severe.

Do not to be led astray, but stand firm. Our standing firm is not what earns salvation, as though God repays us for having his back. Our standing firm is the outworking of our faith — it is the obvious living result of the one who has been converted from love of the world to love of Christ, and realizes the dust and death of everything here, but the eternal gain of Christ Jesus and his Kingdom.

## PRAY

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<sup>7</sup> Jude 3