THE GOSPEL FIRST BE PREACHED

Mark 13:1-37

Key Verse: 10

“And the gospel must first be preached to all nations.”

Thank God for helping us to study Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount of Olives called, “The Olivet Discourse” in Matthew 24 and 25. This is an exhaustive eschatological teaching. In Matthew’s account, Jesus’ coming is vividly described: “As lighting that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man. Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather” and “at that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory.” At the moment of Jesus’ coming, people will be so engrossed in day to day’s physical life of eating and marriage with no meaning of such things and no spiritual life alive to God that they will be just like the people of Noah’s time, who knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. In Matthew’s gospel, Jesus repeatedly teaches that his people must prepare themselves for his unexpected and sudden return, to be ready with the realization of the significance of one’s daily life pattern. He urges us to be the wise and faithful manager who properly feeds those who are under his care, to be like wise virgins who prepared oil in their jars, pure and steadfast love, in eager expectation of the bridegroom’s coming, and to be like good and faithful servants who put what has been entrusted to them to work with faithfulness in doing small things to the Master. And at his coming, all the nations will be gathered before him to be judged for the acceptance into his kingdom of righteousness with eternal life or the rejection to the kingdom, which means eternal punishment in eternal hellfire along with the devil and his angels. It is up to one’s life of service with no self-seeking in the name of Christ that comes from one’s Christ-like character formed in the person. The comparison is between sheep and goats; sheep listen to the voice of the shepherd, while goats are disobedient and rebellious.

We are going to study Jesus’ eschatological teaching according to Mark, which is simple and straightforward, after Matthew’s compound and comprehensive account. Through this continuous eschatological study, we want to have solid faith in our Lord Jesus’ coming again and clearly know how to live in view of his appearing and his kingdom.

Verse 1 says, “As he was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!’” This temple, called Herod’s temple, was a massive monument of his architectural brilliance and his wealth. It was coated with gold, adorned with beautiful stones, and covered with votive offerings of all kinds. In the morning, over the top of the Mount of Olives, people could not even look at the building, because the reflection of the morning off the gold would blind them; in the evening, its glory would only slightly diminish. Perhaps it was the most strikingly beautiful building in the ancient world. One of the disciples was so impressed and said, “Look, Teacher! What wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!” But

Jesus replied in verse 2, “Do you see all these great buildings? Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.” To our surprise, this prophecy of Jesus was exactly fulfilled in AD 70 with not one stone on top of another by a Roman general Titus and his soldiers.

Then in verses 3 and 4 it says, “As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, opposite the temple, Peter, James, John and Andrew asked him privately, ‘Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are about to be fulfilled?’” In Mark’s gospel, four disciples’ names were specifically written: Peter, James, John and Andrew. Interestingly, Peter and John wrote the prophetic books, 2 Peter and Revelation, respectively, undoubtedly remembering the words of Jesus’ teaching on this Mount of Olives. They together complete the eschatological teachings of the Bible. We will reflect on them later. To the disciples, the temple destruction is related to the end of time. According to Matthew, their question is “when will this happen and what will the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” (24:3) They wanted to hear from Jesus about the time and the sign of the fulfillment of all such things at the end of the age.

Jesus said to them in verse 5, “Watch out that no one deceives you. Many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am he,’ and will deceive many.” The first thing Jesus mentioned to watch out for is deception. It is same in Matthew and Luke, “Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many” in Matthew 24:4-5 and “Watch out that you are not deceived. For many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am he,’ and, ‘The time is near’” (Lk 21:8). People of the world will experience worldwide deception more and more. When they refuse to love the truth, God sends a powerful delusion and they believe the lie (2 Thess. 2:10-11). Human smartness will not be able to overcome the deception. The only way to defeat the lie is to hold to the truth. Jesus said to the believing Jews in John 8:31,32, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” However, when they refused to believe the truth, they turned out to be the children of the devil, who is the father of lies.

Nowadays, Muslim expansion seems to be very powerful. At campus we often meet Muslim students, who do not refuse to hear the gospel. It’s good to know about Islam. I have learned that Muslims have their own eschatology. In Islam, the Mahdi, a descendant of Mohemmed, will be a messianic figure.. He will be an unparalleled leader. He will come out of a crisis of turmoil. He will take control of the world and establish a new world order. He will destroy all who resist him and invade many nations. He will make a seven-year peace treaty with the Jews. He will conquer Israel and massacre the Jews. He will establish Islamic world headquarters at Jerusalem. He will rule for seven years, establish Islam as the only religion. He will come on a white horse with supernatural power. He will be loved by all people on earth. The description of the Mahdi is exactly the description of the biblical Antichrist, the beast of Revelation 13. And in their system, they have Jesus. To them Jesus was a man, not God. He did not die; he went to heaven like Elijah. He did not provide an atonement. He was nothing more than a prophet. He is now in heaven, standing alongside Allah, waiting for Allah to send him back. When he comes back, he will straighten out the misguided Christians, who think he was God who died and rose again and provided atonement. After he gets here, he will marry, have children, and die and be buried next to Mohammed. That is the Muslim Jesus. And he espouses the cause of the Mahdi. He is the executor of the Mahdi. He is the Mahdi’s prophet, and it is he who kills the Islamic Antichrist, called Dajjal, the Islamic great deceiver, a false miracle worker. He claims to be Jesus, the Son of God, attempting to stop the Mahdi and his follower Jesus. But the Muslim Jesus will fight this Jesus, kill him and establish Islam forever. As the Mahdi is the exact replica of the Antichrist, the Jesus prophet in Islam is the exact parallel to the false prophet in Revelation 13. This is their view of the Christ; our Jesus is their Antichrist; our Antichrist is their redeemer. It is a Satanic counterfeit that is in complete reverse.

Watch out for such deception. Watch out for false messiahs and false prophets. Anyone or anything that gives false hopes is in the category of false messiahs; communism, democracy, hedonism, mammonism, sports games, etc. The world is deceptive. Furthermore, the heart is deceitful above all things (Jer. 17:9). Again, the way to overcome deception within and without is through the word of God. The truth of God’s word cleanses our hearts and minds and sanctifies us (Jn 15:3; 17:17), and we can see things clearly and discern and overcome deceptions. This can be one clear reason to meditate on the word of God and hold to it personally, not lingering in the grey area.

In verses 7-9 Jesus continues, “When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains.” Wars will happen on a bigger scale and be more destructive worldwide, earthquakes will happen with more increasing intensity, and famines will devastate the entire world. While deception is an internal thing, wars, earthquakes and famines, are external.

According to Jesus, these are the beginning of birth pains. When we see a pregnant woman, the beginning of birth pains signs that the child in her womb is in a normal stage and the pains will grow intense rapidly in shorter and shorter intervals, reaching the climax of birth pangs at the time of the very birth of a new life. The woman and people around her are full of hope and joy for the child to be born. Who can have such a view when the world situation becomes worse and worse, growing dark and gloom. But Jesus wants his people redeemed through his very life to have such a view of the world in sureness of his coming back.

Then Jesus says in verses 9-11, “You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them. And the gospel must first be preached to all nations. Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just way whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.” Humanly speaking they would have no reason to be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues, or to be arrested and brought to trial. But it is solely on account of Jesus. And all these will be opportunities to be witnesses of Jesus, and the Holy Spirit will be with them speaking through them. And Jesus clearly said, “The gospel must first be preached to all nations.” What a hope! At that time the disciples’ spiritual condition was that they would all run away at the time of Jesus’ crucifixion and death. But Jesus had such hope and vision for them and his hope has been true and will come true. According to Matthew 24:14, “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.” Gospel preaching is the will of God and is to be a “must” in the lives of Jesus’ disciples with first priority. Jesus began his earthly messianic ministry of the gospel by proclaiming the good news of God, “The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!” (Mk 1:15). Right after his resurrection, Jesus said to his disciples, “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation” (Mk 16:15). And just before his ascension Jesus said to them, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Ac 1:8). We see that from the beginning to the end of his life on earth gospel-preaching and being his witnesses filled Jesus’ heart, and it is the very heartbeat of God. And in Revelation during the time of tribulation, the gospel is preached even by an angel flying in midair to every nation, tribe, language and people (Rev 14:6-7). History moves in that direction despite the deception of the world, and God blesses any nation, or organization, or individual that has such direction.

I was newly inspired by UBF history that a small gospel ministry in a small Galilee-like city of South Korea grew to be worldwide. The ministry began by the prayer of two people, Dr. Samuel Lee and M. Sarah Barry. God sent students one by one and leaders were raised. Then whenever they studied the four gospel accounts of Jesus, they realized that each gospel book ends with Jesus’ world mission command of gospel preaching and they were so much burdened. At that time, going to other countries to preach the gospel was very difficult, because of the extremely poor national situation and the threat of the communists of North Korea. Yet, they wanted to obey the command of Christ Jesus. After much prayer they finally sent one missionary to an island at the south end of the country, considering it was abroad and so was a world mission. They supported the missionary for one year despite poor financial situation. It was around four years after the ministry began. That was the seed of world-wide gospel preaching. Now God has sent around 2000 missionaries to more than 80 countries. It is an example of church history of the world.

We cannot miss the best example of Apostle Paul and his ministry. It is to remember his personal direction of the gospel preaching. He said in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, “For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.” And he said to his spiritual son Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:1-2, “In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: “Preach the Word.” May God protect each precious ministry and our Toronto UBF stay in that flow of gospel preaching at any circumstances.

In verses 12-13, Jesus says, “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.” It will be very hard to be persecuted by family members and hated by all men. But Jesus wants his people to stand firm to the end, knowing that it was because of him.

In verse 14, “When you see ‘the abomination that causes desolation’ standing where it does not belong—let the reader understand.” As studied in Daniel and Matthew 24 and 2 Thessalonians, when the final antichrist sets himself up in God’s temple, proclaiming himself to be God, which is really blasphemy to desolation, it triggers the Great Tribulation. During such time people should have a sense of urgency: Jesus continues to say, “then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let no one on the roof of his house go down or enter the house to take anything out. Let no one on the field to go back to get his cloak. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! Pray that this will not take place in winter, because those will be days of distress unequalled from the beginning, when God created the world, until now—and never to be equalled again.” May we believe these words of Jesus that there will an unequalled time of distress/tribulation is coming as the time of the end nears. It is also as written in Daniel 12:1, “…There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then.”

And verse 20 says, “If the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would survive. But for the sake of the elect, whom he has chosen, he has shortened them.” Thank God for the mindfulness of the Lord for the elect even amid the Great Tribulation.

In verses 21 and 22, “At that time if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘Look, there he is!’ do not believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and miracles to deceive the elect—if that were possible. So be on your guard; I have told you everything ahead of time.” No one knows even what will happen tomorrow. Who can say everything to us ahead of time? But there is one. He is our Lord Christ Jesus. It is so that we may be on our guard.

Then Jesus says in verses 24-25, “But in those days, following that distress, ‘the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.’” The world will become in a total darkness with no light from the sun, the moon and stars and with no electric light. Apostle Peter wrote in this way in 2 Peter 10-12, “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar, the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare…That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat.” As for Peter the day of the Lord is very inclusive of the disturbances on earth and in heaven and Jesus’ coming and reigning for a thousand years and final destruction of heaven and earth before a new heaven and a new earth, for with the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years is like a day.” John wrote in Revelation 6:12, “I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as late figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind” and 16:10, “The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was plunged into darkness.” One thing is clear that the sun, the moon, the stars and the heavenly bodies will not go as they have been, but there will be a sudden and awful change.

Then what happens? Verse 26 says, “At that time men will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.” His coming will be splendorous brightening the whole world. When He comes back and turns on the light, when He relights the moon, the moon will have the light of the sun, and the sun will have seven times brighter light than we’ve ever known it to have - when He turns back the lights on His glorious kingdom, as written in Isaiah 30:26. Maybe that’s why the desert blossoms like a rose; who knows what the effect of all that is going to be? The light will shine in the face of Jesus Christ. Paul says in 2 Thessalonians 1:7, “…the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire.” All the enemies of the gospel will be destroyed before his powerful, majestic, and splendorous coming, not being able to stand before him (2 Th. 1:9; 2:8).

In verse 27, “And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.” What an extensive gathering of his elect, his redeemed people on the earth and in the heavens without missing one to enter the millennium kingdom of Christ.

In verses 27-37 Jesus talks about the preparation for his coming. In the parable of the fig tree the appearing of its tender twigs and its leaves show that summer is near. Subsequently Jesus says, “Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door. I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.” His words are most trustworthy.

Jesus continues, “No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. It’s like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with his assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.” Surely as for us, the assigned task is to preach the gospel in light of the Lord’s word, “The gospel must first be preached to all nations.”

Jesus says continually, “Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening (6-9pm), or at midnight (9-12am), or when the rooster crows (3am) or at dawn (6am). If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’”

Particularly he says, “Be on guard! Be alert!” and “keep watch, keep watch” and “Watch!” And already Jesus had said early in this passage, “You must be on your guard”, “So be on your guard.”

7 repetition of such an awakening and warning! “You must be on your guard”, “So be on your guard”, “Be on guard! Be alert!”, “to keep watch”, “Therefore keep watch”, and “Watch!” Such expressions are specially in the gospel of Mark, who seemed to be an intellectual meditative man and who disliked suffering, running away from Pau’s first journey when there were hardships.

What does to be on guard and alert and keep watch and watch mean? Luke 21:36 says, “Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.” While all people of the world are in spiritual slumber, saying, “Peace and safety”, his redeemed people should be on guard and be alert and watch armed with the word of our Lord Jesus spoken to us, engaging in prayer, preaching the gospel with top priority in the assured hope of his coming in clouds with great power and glory.