

We've reached the end of our sermon series on Scripture Illuminated. Two weeks ago we talked about the Wittenberg Altarpiece on Reformation Day. We highlighted how the Reformation sought to restore and represent the sacraments and the preached word. Last week we discussed the Ghent Altarpiece on All Saints Day. We considered the joys awaiting us in heaven, and how the worship service is a window in the life of the world to come.

Now we're moving on to a different piece of art: The Destruction of Jerusalem by Wilhelm von Kaulbach. Today we've reached the end in more way than one. We've reached the end of our sermon series. In our text today, we're approaching the end of Jesus' journey as He enters Jerusalem, soon to be crucified, died and buried. And as we examine this painting in light of Mark 13, we consider *the* end. The end of the world and the second coming of Christ. What we learn today is that **CHRIST GIVES US WHAT WE NEED TO IGNORE THE WONDERFUL STONES AND ENDURE TO THE END.**

This Gospel reading starts innocently enough. **“And as he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, “Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!” 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.””** Well, Jesus knows how to burst the bubble. He knows how to ruin the mood. The disciples were just trying to admire Herod's Temple.

Jews said of the temple: “Whoever has not seen Herod's temple, has never seen anything beautiful.” Objectively speaking, the Temple of Jerusalem was a beautiful sight to behold. It was the center of Jewish worship life. Every year thousands of pilgrims would flock to Jerusalem to make sacrifices as the Jewish law demanded.

Thus, we cannot understate how horrible it was that in A.D. 70 the Temple of Jerusalem was destroyed. The Romans invaded Jerusalem and tore the Temple down to the ground. We see some of the carnage and chaos in this artist's rendition.

This was an amazing feat as Josephus tells us that those bricks were huge. Josephus the Jewish historian records some of the bricks of the temple were about 67' by 7.5' by 9'. I find that incredible, 67' stretches from the back wall to the exit doors behind you! All that's left to this day is one retaining wall called the wailing wall. This day Jews pray at this wall.

It's easy to fault the Jews of the day and tell them not to get too attached to their precious temple, but we're not immune. I. We are all too often transfixed by the wonderful stones and beautiful buildings. What are the wonderful stones and beautiful buildings in your life?

Maybe it's the latest sanctuary remodel project. Maybe it's the latest home improvement. Maybe it's not a physical building as much as it is the legacy you're

trying to build as you consider your children and grandchildren and what you're planning on leaving behind for them.

Maybe it's the building you're doing at work: the latest company your corporation is acquiring, the latest project that will make a name for yourself in your firm, or even just hopes for getting through the next busy season with a leg up. Maybe the wonderful stones are the bricks that make up your body, perhaps you are enamored by your health.

Whatever it is that is your abiding constant, something that you think would never go away, that is what Jesus is warning us against getting too attached to. If even those 67 foot stones were thrown down, what can we rely on that won't fail us?

As we discuss the end times, we realize that II. The End shows us what is really important. The end sounds very ominous, but "the end" can have many meanings. It could be the end of an era: somebody retires after decades at one employer, a restaurant closes, just recently they announced King Street Kitchen is closing. There's been a lot of upheaval since the pandemic.

"The end" The end of a relationship. The end of a job. The end of a loved one's life. What might the end mean for you? As Christians, when we talk about the end, ultimately we mean the end of the world that is Christ's second coming.

But on the way, there are mini ends. This would include the things just mentioned before: the death of a loved one, a divorce or breakup, a health crisis. But there can also be major catastrophes. Look at the painting and see the carnage that is going on: as the Temple is burning on the top left hand corner, see the crowds in crisis below. See the armies marching in on the right. The destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. serves as a model for what will happen when Christ comes again.

Christ warns us in our text: **"Many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he!' and they will lead many astray. And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. This must take place, but the end is not yet. 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... 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."**

The events of the past two years have been nothing short of apocalyptic. Pandemics, civil unrest, violence, and uncertainty. Even now China is rattling its saber against Taiwan and we worry they might go to war. There are supply chain shortages, and COVID is still a real threat.

All of these things we see in the news are warning shots across the bow to wake us up to the reality that none of these things are forever. These little ends

train us for the big end that is coming. Whether they be scary things in the news or scary things in our own lives, these train us to be on our guard, as Jesus tells us.

Yet we need not worry, III. Christ gives His the Holy Spirit to endure to the end. In our painting we see two groups, those two the left who were overly transfixed on the stones of the Temple of Jerusalem and the building, as it burns to the ground, we see them in great suffering and angst. Yet on the right we see a group of Christians who are calm and at peace with their noses in Bibles as they walk out of the ruins of the city.

Christ gives us this promise in verse 13 “**But the one who endures to the end will be saved.**” This is our goal as Christians, to endure to the end. We endure by clinging to Christ. In as far as you cling to Christ, it doesn’t matter your situation, you are safe and secure. That’s what we see of the Christians on the right. In as far as you reject Christ, it doesn’t matter how much insurance you have, how many guns in your closet, or how many booster shots you received, you are in grave danger. That’s one main takeaway from this sermon, that your circumstances are secondary to whether you are trusting in Christ to save you and to protect you.

Yet Christ tells us not to be anxious. He promises us His Holy Spirit. “**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.**”

The Holy Spirit uses the Word and Sacrament to strengthen our faith to endure all evils. Thus, we take to heart the words of Hebrews 10 “**And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.**” Seek Christ where He may be found, and that is in the apostle’s teaching, the fellowship, the breaking of the bread, and the prayers. All the more as we see the end approaching.

We seek out these things because it ties us closer to the only End that matters. The End I’m talking about is the end Jesus suffered in Jerusalem. In His torture, suffering, and crucifixion, Jesus took on the end times wrath of the Father that was directed at you. By destroying the Temple that was His body, we can endure all sorts of destruction, suffering, and death.

But the End Jesus suffered was not the final word. He rose again on the third day, and the Temple that was His body was rebuilt. As we approach the end of all things, we can endure by the power of the Holy Spirit knowing that Christ’s Second Coming is not the End, but a beginning.

It is the beginning of a world without sin. It is the beginning of a city without need for a temple “**for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.**” So even now as we look toward the end, we can celebrate beginnings as the Lord is building us up as living stones in His holy temple.