

The Bedrock of Faith

Mark 13:1-8

In 1943 Thomas Watson, chairman of IBM, said, "I think there's a world market for maybe five computers."

In 1949 Popular Mechanics magazine made this prediction: "Where a calculator on the ENIAC is equipped with 18,000 vacuum tubes and weighs 30 tons, computers in the future may have only 1,000 vacuum tubes and weigh only 1.5 tons."

Inventor Lee DeForest claimed that "While theoretically and technically television may be feasible, commercially and financially it is an impossibility."

One more. In 1962 The Decca Recording Co. made this statement: "We don't like their sound, and guitar music is on the way out." Do you know who they were talking about? A few lads from Liverpool, the Beatles, who transformed the world of music.

In our lesson this morning, as the disciples are walking away from the Temple in Jerusalem, Jesus looks back at and predicts, "See all these great buildings? Not one stone will be left on another."

To the disciples this was unfathomable. The Temple was the bedrock of their faith. No one could conceive of these walls or this Temple being destroyed.

The whole "Temple" thing is foreign to us. When we hear "Temple," we think of a huge architectural construct, dedicated to offering sacrifices to God, overseen by a genetically chosen group of "priests." But for first-century pious Jews, the Temple was more than just that.

The Temple was the center of the faith universe for Jews. The sacrifices and pilgrimages mandated by the Torah were carried out in the Temple, yes, but it was so much more.

For the faithful Jew, the Temple was their "living room." The Temple was the place to feel safe and be completely convinced that, spiritually, you were doing the right thing and following the right procedures in order to be right with God.

Jesus' declaration of the destruction and desolation of the Temple was a declaration that an entire way of living, worshiping, and believing was coming to an abrupt, and violent end.

The Temple in Jerusalem was not just a solemn place of organized worship. It was like your "family room," – a homey yet sacred space in Judaism. Every courtyard that the faithful entered invited them into the coziest "living space" of God's family room.

The predicted destruction of the Temple was more than the devastation left by Hurricane Sandy, which washed away walls and windows. But that's what the disciples focused on – the structure, the candlesticks, the stones.

Read the passage carefully and you'll realize that Jesus is pointing to himself not than the Temple. And they didn't get it. Forty years later what the disciples envisioned and what Jesus declared both came true. In 70 AD the Temple walls came tumbling down, and faith in Jesus continued to stand firm.

And in the process, we learn what true bedrock faith is all about. The kind of faith you can stand on, build on. The kind of faith that lasts.

First of all, **we learn that bedrock faith is not in Temples.** Place yourself in first century Jerusalem. From anywhere in the city you can look up and see the Temple.

The 45-year project of King Herod was the third such Temple. Temple life had been the center of their national life for a thousand years. In the Temple Jews were sacrificed, sins were confessed, God was given the first fruits of the harvest, lambs were sacrificed yearly for the nations' sins.

In the Temple Passover, Pentecost, the Day of Atonement, the Feasts of Tabernacles, and the Feast of Weeks were celebrated. With the Temple so central to their life and worship they must have wondered how they would worship God without a Temple?

And the Disciples did not have an answer.

We humans get tied to things. We get used to things being a certain way. We even develop sentimental attachments to things. But the Temple was not just any "thing"; the Temple was unique.

Deuteronomy states that God himself is the architect and gave the exact dimension of the Altar, the grounds, the Walls, the doors, everything - down to the very size of the stones that would be used. This was God's house.

After Christ's resurrection Christians continued to make sacrifices at the temple. Paul makes an offering at the Temple (you can read about it in Acts 21). The Temple is the place where John's birth was announced, Jesus' preeminence was recognized by Simeon and Anna, Jesus' religious intelligence was recognized by the leaders when he was 12, and where money changers were driven out years later. It was at the Temple that Paul was arrested.

With the Temple so central to the lives of the people that they could not envision worshipping God without it.

Secondly, **we learn that bedrock faith is not found in signs.** Tell us, the disciples insisted, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they all are about to be fulfilled?

A TV preacher was selling his new book that supposedly explained everything we needed to know about the coming of Jesus and the end of time. "You must have this book," he said over and over again, and at the bottom of the screen flashed a telephone number (it wasn't even toll-free).

"In my book I give you prophetic insight into world events, and for the small fee of \$14.95 you could have the benefit of my wisdom. Without my book, you won't be able to survive the coming terrors."

Another pastor called the number and suggested to the poor operator that if this preacher really thought that his book was so vital to the survival of the planet, and that the end was, in fact, so near, the author should give the book away! "I mean," he said; "the author won't need the money, right? I mean, if it's all coming to an end in the very near future, who needs a bank account?"

The operator explained that there were costs involved in printing, binding, advertising, and mailing the book. But the pastor countered that the author could take out a loan, which, when the world came to an end, he wouldn't have to pay back.

The poor operator on the other end of the line was not amused. "Sorry, sir," she said, "but I don't know much about theology." "Apparently", said the pastor "Neither does the author of the book you're selling."

It's the greatest of all biblical mysteries. 23 of the 27 New Testament books claim that Christ will one day return but we have no indication of when that will be or what will

usher it in. The problem with predicting the Second Coming is that most predictions center on world events.

Let me let you in on a little secret. World events are not indicators of End Times. Wars, earthquakes, international political instability or insanity, famine, persecution... these are not signs of the end. They are simply facts of life. We see this in verse 7: Do not be alarmed; these things must happen; the end is still to come.

Listen to me...I can't tell you when but I can tell you why - to redeem this planet, and you and me with it. If you don't live with the expectation that Christ will one day return, you've missed one of the bedrock teachings of Jesus' life. It ought to be part of your life. It will make you watchful, cautious, and prepared.

Lastly, **we learn that bedrock faith is found in Christ.** Here's another Mel Brooks illustration.

Several years ago, Carl Reiner and Mel Brooks did a comedy skit called the "2013 Year Old Man". In the skit, Reiner is a TV interviewer and Brooks is the old Jewish gentleman.

At one point, Reiner asks the old man, "Did you always believe in the Lord?" Brooks replied: "No. We had a guy in our village named Phil, and for a time we worshiped him."

Reiner: You worshiped a guy named Phil? Why? Brooks: Because he was big, and mean, and he could break you in two with his bare hands!

Reiner: Did you have prayers? Brooks: Yes, would you like to hear one? O Phil, please don't be mean, and hurt us, or break us in two with your bare hands.

Reiner: So when did you start worshipping the Lord? Brooks: Well, one day a big thunderstorm came up, and a lightning bolt hit Phil. We gathered around and saw that he was dead. Then we said to one another, "There's somthin' bigger than Phil!"

In our lesson this morning, the disciples are warned to: "Watch out, that no one deceives you. Many will come in my name claiming, "I am he," and will deceive many."

There are a lot of false messiahs in the world today claiming to have answers. Deranged people trying to be world leaders. They manipulate, lie, and recruit people to kill in God's name. They may go by many labels, but they are all terrorists. But they best watch out, because there's something bigger than Phil.

History will sweep these people under the rug. And there will be others. But one day Phil is going to get his. Christ will return.

And I trust that when that day comes, we all will stand, not on the bedrock of a Temple made with human hands but with Christ, who is the bedrock of our faith. Amen.