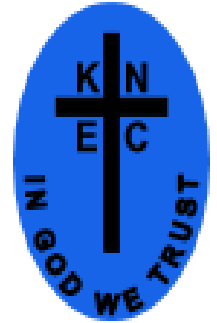




# Kirknewton and East Calder Parish Church of Scotland

Scottish Charity No. SC006973

[www.knec4jesus.org.uk](http://www.knec4jesus.org.uk)



**Reading** Mark 13 : 1-8

## **Sermon: 15 November 2009**

In Mark chapter 13 verses 1 to 8 Jesus is preparing his disciples to accept his coming death and absence. Jesus is also telling them some fascinating stuff that will happen in the future.

But let's begin at the beginning. Jesus is leaving the temple. As he is leaving the temple, one of his disciples makes a remark about the architectural excellence of the building. Then Jesus says, "But this marvellous piece of human excellence is going to be destroyed"! The temple they are talking about is of course the third temple that was built by Herod the Great to impress his Jewish subjects and foreign allies and foes. Herod needed to impress the Jews because he was only a half Jew, probably the descendant of an Idumean, and was placed on the throne by the Romans. The building of the Temple was begun in 20–19 B.C. and in the time of Jesus was not yet completely finished. It was built on the top of Mount Moriah. Instead of leveling off the summit of the mountain a kind of vast platform was formed by rising up walls of massive masonry and enclosing the whole area. On these walls a platform was laid, strengthened by piers which distributed the weight of the superstructure. Josephus tells us that some of these stones were forty feet long by twelve feet high by eighteen feet wide. It would be some of these vast stones that moved the Galilean disciples to such wondering amazement.

The importance of the Temple in the religious life of Jews at this time is evident in the New Testament. The birth of John the Baptist was announced in the Temple and the sacrificial offering for every Jewish male child was offered there. The Temple was also the place where his future prominence was announced by Simeon and Anna in the Gospel of Luke. Jesus' religious significance was first seen in the Temple, and he taught in its grounds when he went to Jerusalem.

Now Jesus is saying this important religious building, this magnificent work of art is going to be demolished! What a prediction!

And the best part: well everything happened just as Jesus predicted. It all happened during the Jewish rebellion against Rome where at the end of the war in 70 AD it was destroyed by the Roman army under the command of Titus the son of the Roman emperor Vespasianus.

Jesus then proceeded from the temple and crossed the Kidron River to the Mount of Olives which was on the east side of the temple. This was appropriate because it was higher than the city, and therefore afforded a marvellous view of the temple. Then the first disciples that Jesus called, Peter, James, John and Andrew ask him in private when it will happen. Jesus responds by not telling them exactly what they want to hear but warns them not to jump to unwarranted conclusions or listen to false predictions.

Jesus emphasizes his point by referring frequently to the Greek word for "watch out" (□ □ □ □ □ in this chapter. They must be on the lookout for false signs and predictions. They must be cautious in their following of Jesus.

In vv. 6–8 Jesus says that there will be several things happening: false messiahs (v. 6), wars (vv. 7–8a), and natural disasters (v. 8b) but still it would not be the end. What is striking about these predictions is that it comes from several parts in the Old Testament. According to 2 Chronicles nations will wage war against nations, and according to Isaiah 19:2 kingdoms will stand against kingdoms. There will also be many false messiahs leading the people astray. There will be many natural disasters and human suffering but still it will not be the end.

And then to explain this Jesus uses language from the Old Testament to make his point. The description of labour pains was used to illustrate the suffering of humans before the coming of the Messiah, according to several texts in the Old Testament. It is just signs and merely the beginning of the end!

In fact Jesus warns them not to be blinded by all these events but to focus on their relationship with him and not to trust on human sureties like buildings or human predictions, but on God alone. He is in charge. He controls life and death, the present, the future and the past! He exists forever and ever! He is the only one that knows when the end will be but until that time all that people of faith can do is to trust and obey!

And this to us must be a timely message because I think this is where most of us have it wrong. We either live so much in the past or in the future that the present slips by unnoticed. It is then that we forget to follow Jesus here and now. It is then that we do not face the sufferings and the hardship of the present with hope and faith.

Jesus warns us too to be careful not to play God and make predictions over the end of time. It is not our business. No, Jesus wants us to live in the present like people who have a sure future, a future that is infinite and not built by human hands. He wants us to live in the present with hope and faith despite all the hardship and suffering that we endure on a daily basis. He wants us to be so sure of His presence everyday that He sent his Holy Spirit to be with us, to nurture our faith and keep the hope alive of the everlasting life. I found this so true the past week when I visited Mrs Phemie McLay.

She was so sure of the everlasting life that she could die in peace.

Jesus also teaches us in this reading that nothing is impossible for God. God is in control. He can allow the temple to be destroyed although in the thinking of the disciples it was unimaginable! God is in charge and He alone knows when the final hour will strike.

All the things that we experience like wars, famine, poverty, sickness and false prophets are only labour pains. To me personally this is a very striking metaphor because it is during the birth process that you realize very vividly that no human is in charge but God alone. It was then that I experienced, as a bystander, that the person who is giving birth has no control. But off course I have not been through labour myself and I duly admit that, according to Nanda, I've got no idea what a painful process this is.

Likewise life is often a painful process of dying and parting, a constant struggle that is impossible to endure without the constant guidance and presence of the Lord.

May we listen to the warnings of Jesus and live by faith every moment of everyday!

**Amen**

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## Readings for the week

### Mark 13.1-8

It is only natural for people to be proud of their achievements, and the new Temple in Jerusalem was certainly worthy of admiration. Begun in 20 BC by Herod the Great, it grew to cover over 20 acres of land with its courtyards, stairs and colonnaded walkways. According to the ancient church historian Josephus, each stone weighed several tons and the white marble pillars were 10 metres (twenty-five cubits) high. For Jesus to claim that not one stone would be left on top of another must have completely astounded his hearers. His prophecy was fulfilled in AD 70 when the Roman army under General Titus destroyed both the Temple and a significant part of Jerusalem. This speech is known as the Olivet Discourse because Jesus delivered it whilst sitting on the Mount of Olives. The four disciples who were with Jesus were convinced that the Temple could only fall at the end of the age. They naturally wanted to know both when this would happen and how to recognise it for what it was, Jesus does not provide a succinct answer but warns against the dangers of being deceived and led astray by false messiahs — presumably those who will claim to have the answer. He uses the imagery of birth pangs to enable the disciples to appreciate the painful and protracted nature of the coming of God's kingdom as well as the potential for great joy that these events presage.

Other readings: Daniel 12.1—3; Psalm 16; Hebrews 10.11—14, (15—18), 19—25.

### Prayer

There is nowhere we will go  
and nothing we will endure  
and no-one we will meet  
that will separate us from God's loving care.

**Amen.**