

The Second Sunday Before Advent 2024

A Sermon on Mark 13. 1 to 18 and Hebrews 10:11-14, 19-25

By the Rev. Shilo Varughese

All of us want to live longer and longer and prefer not to think of death or the end. But as we are approaching the end of the liturgical year, every year the church makes sure that we don't ignore this by presenting us scriptural passages about the end days what is known as the apocalyptic messages.

And to preach about these end times is not an easy task because it is not an interesting subject. However, for those of us who take the teachings of the Bible of Jesus seriously, the end times, the coming of the Son of Man, the end of the universe and so on are matters close to our faith.

So, each year before we begin the new liturgical year with the Advent season, we have these two great reminders, firstly about our end times and secondly about our Jesus Christ as the King of the universe.

We see, in the gospel of Mark chapter 13, Christ foretell the destruction of Jerusalem temple, wars, earthquakes and famine that leads to the end time. Times of gloom and doom.

The year was the AD 66 Christ prediction of the coming destruction of the Jerusalem was soon to be fulfilled. War clouds hanged in the air; rumours of war filled the city of Jerusalem.

Christians were escaped from that city. But it was in 70 AD that Titus attacked Jerusalem. As he did, over one million Jews died in the destruction of Jerusalem and that would include some of the Roman soldiers.

It was one of the most devastating attacks in the history of warfare, a million people died. When the Romans surrounded Jerusalem, the famine in Jerusalem became so great that Jewish spy left the city to find just a very few herbs that were growing, and they risk their lives. When they came back in the city, and often, they were killed because others wanted that food.

Some chewed on shoe leather to try to get a few vitamins. Parents killed their children to eat their flesh, as horrible as that is.

The destruction of the temple at Jerusalem was very significant, not only for Jews but also significant for Jewish Christians, because one must recognize this is only about 40 yrs since the death of Christ. And they were those Jewish Christians that continued to believe in the ceremonial system.

There were those Jewish Christian who focused their attention on that tabernacle and the destruction of that tabernacle was actually devastating for them.

Now, shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem, Paul sent a letter to the Hebrews in the mid 60's shortly before Jerusalem was destroyed.

And the reason why the apostle sends that letter was to encourage the Hebrews with the reality. Although the earthly sanctuary would be destroyed, there would be a heavenly sanctuary that they could focus their attention on, where Christ were ministering for them.

Understanding these eternal principles in the book of Hebrews the Christians in the first century would not only survive, but they would also thrive.

And if we understand the principles in the book of Hebrews, we will not only survive crises we face today but will thrive in the crisis that will come in the future. They are the survival secrets for an end time generation to prepare them for the coming of Jesus.

They echo and re-echo daily tasks in order to prepare end-time generation for the upcoming crisis.

Who are the end-time generations?

Those who wait for Jesus' second coming are end-time generations. We are part of it.

Is there any hope for us in the end times, and how do we survive?

We are assured of our survival and hope in Paul's letter to the Hebrews.

Hebrews chapter 10, verse 19 is the heart of the book of Hebrews. This passage sums up the entire book.

This was revolutionary for the ancient Hebrews when they read this. When the ancient priests entered the ancient sanctuary, they came with fear and trembling. They were coming to the presence of God, filled with anxiety.

But here Paul says in Hebrews, therefore let us come confidently, freely as we can approach God, not filled with fear not filled with anxiety on whether we are good enough to be saved, but we can approach God with confidence, full assurance and absolute certainty that He loves us, accepts us, and longs to welcome us as we come into His presence.

We enter the sanctuary, the holiest place, directly into God's presence by the blood of Jesus. Paul says that it's a new living way. In the Old Testament, the priest used to enter with fear because they entered with the blood of animals. But we enter with confidence because of the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. We enter with confidence because of what Jesus has done for us.

This morning Paul reminds us of some survival secrets. First, draw near with faith as God wants to call us friends. Secondly, hold fast our minds to his words that we experience through scripture.

Lastly, Paul says, let us consider how to encourage one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet one another.

We may face war clouds, crisis, circumstances that put us down. We may feel like everything is ending. But don't let our fear keep us from gathering together. Because we need one another. We need the encouraging words of our brothers and sisters. Don't allow the fears to keep us isolated. We need to be together. Our words have unusual power to encourage or discourage, to uplift or press down, to bring joy or sorrow.

Let our gatherings be fulfilled with hope, time to touch somebody with God's grace, touch somebody with God's hope, lift somebody with God's spirit and encourage their heart.

Amen.