

Don't Give Up the Ship

Mark 13:1-13

Introduction

James Lawrence was a Navy Captain commanding the *USS Chesapeake* during the War of 1812. On June 1, 1813, his crew was locked in a fight with the British *HMS Shannon* and he was shot. As he grappled with this fatal injury, Lawrence's last command was "Don't give up the ship." These heroic words were turned to legend shortly after by his friend and fellow naval officer, Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry, a hero in his own right. In September of that year, Perry had those words stitched on his battle ensign. With that flying over his flagship, the *USS Lawrence*, he vanquished the Royal Navy on Lake Erie, cutting the British and their Native American allies off from their western supply bases. Since then, this saying has become the rallying cry of the US Navy. In the words of Midshipman First Class Kara Yingling, "[It] inspires us to do more, to not give up, but also it stands for our core values of honor, courage and commitment. It means to get the mission done and don't compromise." In our Gospel lesson today, Jesus is telling us, "Don't give up the ship!"

"Be On Your Guard"

In this chapter, Jesus foretells the destruction of the Jerusalem temple and the end times. But it's not just about what's going to happen at the end. He's warning us about what will happen in the world before the end, how it will affect us, and what we should do about it. His command here, is in essence, "Don't give up the ship." No matter how tough things get, stay committed, don't compromise, and get the job done. He begins by giving us a list of things we should be on guard against.

Trust in buildings and the accoutrements of religion – v. 2

Herod's temple was magnificent. It covered 40 acres, was over 1500 feet long, 1000 feet wide, and its highest wall was 158 feet from bedrock. No wonder the disciples were impressed. But Jesus said not to get too carried away by its impressiveness. It wouldn't last. The same is true with all trappings of religion. We shouldn't let ourselves get distracted by buildings, campuses, choirs, or anything that we think of when we think of large, successful churches. That's all passing away.

False teachers – v. 6

It seems like there are more false teachers in our world all the time. Especially popular are the proponents of the Gospel of prosperity. But there are others, people who claim to have had visions and revelations from the Lord and teach things that are directly opposed to Scripture. The only way to be on guard against them is to arm ourselves with the truth of the Gospel. That's why Bible study is so important.

Wars and natural catastrophes – v. 7-8

Wars and natural disasters have been with us since the Fall. The second recorded sin in the Bible is an act of violence—murder. The face of war has changed over the years, as well as the weapons used. Since Viet Nam, wars have been more accessible to us as the media began bringing them into our living rooms. With the Internet and smart phones, we can have them wherever we go. The same is true with natural disasters. But Jesus says, "*The end is not yet. These are [only] the beginning of birth pains*" (v. 8).

Just Stand

There are things that will happen before the end that Jesus says we must endure.

Political persecution – v. 9

He says that we will be put on trial for our faith. We see this increasing with time. We will stand only if our faith is grounded solidly in the Word of God. We have access to this anchor each week in Word and Sacrament.

Destruction of the family – v. 12

Through divorce, abortion, sexual perversions, role reversals, and gender changing, we see the destruction of the family unit. The Gospel is the only thing that can preserve this God-ordained building block of society. We must stand firm for it, by the Word of God.

Hated by all – v. 13

We will be hated by all. This doesn't mean we are to go out of our way to be hated. That's not necessary. When we stand for the truth of God's Word, the natural reaction of a fallen world is hatred. Being a Christian is not a popularity contest. That's why our Christian fellowship is so vital to our church life. We find strength in our solidarity.

Endure

Jesus calls us to endure, or in the words of James Lawrence, "Don't give up the ship!" As we said before, we get the strength to do this in Word and Sacrament.

Preach the Word – v. 10

We endure when we preach the Word. This isn't just a command for pastors. The way we live our lives and *let our light shine* (**Matthew 5:16**) is how we all preach the Gospel.

Give an account – v. 11

We endure when we stand in the power of the Holy Spirit and give an account for our faith. I've heard people say, "I don't know if I could stand up to persecution." In our own power none of us could. But when Jesus gives us a command, He gives us the power of the Holy Spirit to carry it out. Once again, we receive that power through the Means of Grace. Receive the Word and Sacrament today, and **DON'T GIVE UP THE SHIP!**

*And the peace of God,
Which surpasses all understanding,
Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
