

11-15-09

The Shaking of the Foundations  
Mark 13:1-8

Last Wednesday was Veterans Day. Through the years, the United States has sent its troops and contributed where there has been a need for peace and justice in the world. It is meaningful to memorialize those whom we lost in the World Wars, Korea, Vietnam, Lebanon, Grenada, Panama, Somalia, Iraq and Afghanistan. Those who participated in wars and fought for justice and peace for the world are worthy to be memorialized, respected and held with pride by the people of the United States.

Nobody wants to be in danger and killed in a war, no matter what the situation. If we are able to sleep safe at night today, it is because someone kept the night watch, at the alert, in our stead. The job of a soldier is not often counted as an attractive one for those who seek only their own welfare.

When I was an army chaplain in Korea, there was a lieutenant colonel named Man-Kiel Chun, a Christian officer, who later became a three star general. He told me, "Chaplain Cho, I have been a professional soldier for my entire young life. When I go to heaven, probably I will be unemployed there because there will be no war." Each soldier has to have a branch of service where he or she can serve. He felt that there would not be a branch of service in heaven for him. I said, "I will be unemployed too, because nobody would want to hear my preaching while the Lord is there!"

If there were one place where it would be possible to have no need of lawyers, no medical doctors, and no military, it would be heaven. But, where we live, always there are quarrels, fights, killings and wars, ceaselessly. Where there is a spirit of sacrifice for others, the Kingdom of God is near.

Today's scripture lesson, Mark 13:1-8, is about questions and answers concerning the End. These are dialogues between the disciples and the Lord Jesus while they were passing Jerusalem, looking upon Herod's Temple.

Herod's Temple was acknowledged as one of the wonders of the world. When you visit Jerusalem, you can see the traces of Herod's Temple there still. Some of the stones were said to be forty feet long by twelve feet high and wide. The buildings of the Temple complex were impressive. "Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and building!" the disciples exclaimed. To their exclamation, the Lord Jesus answered, "There will not be left one stone upon another." Jerusalem was, in fact, destroyed completely in the year 70 A.D. The prediction of Jesus was fulfilled with dreadful accuracy.

As Jesus sat there, on top of the Mount of Olives looking over the temple, the “inner circle” (Peter, James, and John), plus dependable Andrew, asked him privately when these things would be and what sign they could expect to assure them of fulfillment.

Have you heard about the year 2012? We hear rumors about 2012 these days, particularly with the movie that just came out this weekend entitled, “2012.” According to Nostradamus and the Mayan calendar, the world will soon come to an end in late 2012. Some say that Nostradamus had even predicted the fall of the world trade centre, which eventually turned out to be true.

To interpret this scripture correctly, I had to seek out and read a commentary of the Bible. There was a warning sign in the commentary, which read, “Study carefully the Exegesis. This is one of the most difficult chapters in the Bible to understand and evaluate.”

For a medical doctor, Morphine is a medicine carefully prescribed. If it is misused or abused, it can be dangerous for the patient. Like morphine, the issue of the last day of the world needs to be evaluated carefully. But, many populists in the name of evangelists are tending to misinterpret this scripture. We would do well to find out the intentions behind those evangelists who speak about the end of the world. Do they ask us for money? Do they alert us to moral or religious awakening?

“What will be the sign when these things are all to be accomplished?” is the question of the disciples and of us. However, the answer of Jesus was not focused on the “when” or “what” will be the sign. He warned us “Do not be shaken by the false Messiahs.” Wars, earthquakes, famines will all happen. But do not be troubled by these. It will be the beginnings of sorrows. The term translated “beginnings” means “birth-pang,” the pain of travail.

“The beginnings of birth pangs have started, but the end shall not be yet.” This is a classic theological understanding of “eschatology,” a word which means the study of the end times, from the Greek word “eschaton,” which means the end, or the last. The classic Christian understanding of the end times has always been that we are living between the “already” and the “not yet,” in terms of the ending of the world.

Personally, I have a view of the End of the world. I would call this view, “existential eschatology.” My life itself is the beginning and ending of the world. I’m holding the Kingdom of God. Jesus our Lord said, “The Kingdom of God is in you.” You and I may have our life ending within couple of weeks. Anytime, really. That is the time of the ending of the world—at least for the one whose life comes to an end. We don’t know when our personal life ending will come. Be prepared for your personal life ending, which for you is the end of world.

The Christians of the early church are here warned against being led astray by anyone who cries, "This is it!" We can well understand how natural the question "When?" would be to a church under persecution. The answer given them was not a date on a calendar, but God. Faith in a dependable God, who would act in his own time, was what they were offered. It was that which kept up their morale and endurance.

About twelve years ago, I had a big car accident on interstate 70 near Vail. There were four people, including myself, Sun, and our guests in our car. But, no one got hurt or wounded among us.

The car accident occurred while driving from Denver to West Vail on the interstate 70 on a fair day in March. The guests in our car were a visiting professor at the University of Denver from Korea and his wife. They were not Christian at the time, but since the Korean Church is also a place to meet Korean people, they attended my church regularly.

One day, I offered to take them sight-seeing in the Rocky Mountains and to entertain them at a hot springs. So, we started on this drive which met with a terrible car accident. When we drove past Idaho Springs, it was a wonderful day in March, warm with a clear, blue sky.

We all agreed to go farther west toward the mountains. It was around eleven o'clock in the morning when we drove near Vail, Colorado. When our car approached Vail pass, the weather suddenly changed to gray and unexpected snowstorms. The drive past Vail pass was about a six degree downhill slope, and the snowstorm made the road packed with ice. To keep control of the car, we had to reducing speed drastically.

Driving very carefully on the downhill road, I noticed many cars rolled over, and collisions directly in front of us only a hundred feet away. There was no escape since both of the two lanes in front of us were blocked by cars which had piled up in a big collision. On the left lane, there was a four-wheel drive jeep rolled over and on the right lane, a huge semi-truck was stopped. So, I had to come to a stop, skidding up behind the semi-truck. The real accident did not occur there, however. As soon as we came to a stop, bumping up against the semi-truck, I looked in the rear-view mirror to see another huge, loaded semi-trailer directly behind us. We were all frightened when we realized that we were about to be sandwiched between the semi in front of us, and the semi fast approaching behind us. I told the passengers in my car, "Duck and take cover under the seats!" And then, I heard Sun crying, "Lord, Lord help us!"

I heard a loud bang and felt my car crashing under the truck in front of us. When the shaking stopped, we found miraculously that we were all safe in the car. I got out of the car and found the front hood of my car shorn off and the front of the car stuck under the truck in front of us. And, the windshield was

cracked into a thousand pieces like cob webs. And, I also found several more car collisions piled up behind us.

It took an hour for an ambulance and a fire truck to come, find the wounded, and take care of them. It was lucky that my car was still moveable in that condition. After reporting the accident to the police, I continued to drive that torn up car, managed still to entertain our guests at the hot spring, and eat the lunch that Sun had prepared that day! Ultimately, we had lost nothing through the accident. I reported the car accident and made a claim on my insurance and got enough compensation to buy another, better car. And, more importantly, our friends in the back seat became Christians through the experience of the car accident.

Professor Ro, who had been in my car, confessed later, “Pastor Cho, I realized that there was a God who protected us from the car accident. And I found you as a man of God at that time. You were so calm and at peace during the accident on that day and even entertained us, happily, forgetting the car accident. I decided to become a Christian that day.”

Several years later I had an opportunity to visit Korea and I contacted Professor Ro. He became a dean at a University in Seoul. He asked me my schedule on that day and then he cancelled his classes and meetings for me. He told his students, “I have a guest who is very important in my life and I have to meet him today. My class is cancelled and you are free from class today.” He spent all day long for me, showing me around Seoul and treated me well.

Here is the message for those who are living in an age of the shaking of the foundations.

“Whoever wins the victory will receive this from me: I will be his God, and he will be my son.” (Revelation 21:7)

Jesus said, “The one who hears and does is like a man who built his house on the solid rock. When the storms beat on it in all their fury, it still stood firm.”

Jesus pictured the careless hearers as like a man who foolishly built his house on sand, and so lost it.

Those who build one’s life purpose on this world are like a man who foolishly built his house on sand. The shaking of the foundations is not a problem for those who build one’s life on the solid rock of Jesus. We are living in a time of the shaking of the foundations in many ways: wars, earthquakes, diseases, shortages, unemployment, hurricanes and many dangers.

God is our refuge and strength, as ever present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth gives way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its water roar and foam and the mountains quake with surging. (Psalm 46:1-3)

Trust and obeying Him is the strategy of life and our refuge and strength.