

## **Not One Stone**

11-14-21

Mark 13:1-8

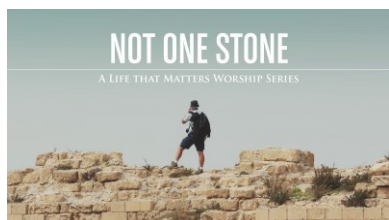
*As Jesus was leaving the Temple that day, one of his disciples said, “Teacher, look at these magnificent buildings! Look at the impressive stones in the walls.”*

*<sup>2</sup> Jesus replied, “Yes, look at these great buildings. But they will be completely demolished. Not one stone will be left on top of another!”*

*<sup>3</sup> Later, Jesus sat on the Mount of Olives across the valley from the Temple. Peter, James, John, and Andrew came to him privately and asked him, <sup>4</sup> “Tell us, when will all this happen? What sign will show us that these things are about to be fulfilled?”*

*<sup>5</sup> Jesus replied, “Don’t let anyone mislead you, <sup>6</sup> for many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am the Messiah.’<sup>[a]</sup> They will deceive many. <sup>7</sup> And you will hear of wars and threats of wars, but don’t panic. Yes, these things must take place, but the end won’t follow immediately. <sup>8</sup> Nation will go to war against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in many parts of the world, as well as famines. But this is only the first of the birth pains, with more to come.*

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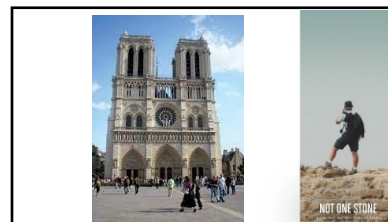
“Lord, what a magnificent temple! Look at the size of those stones! How do you suppose they managed to get them in place way back then? Well, it certainly is a marvel! No wonder it has stood so long – no one could throw down such a building!”

Can you picture the tourists? They could be sightseeing in any old city, couldn’t they?

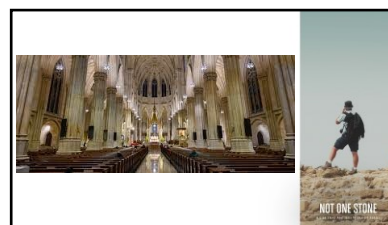
Here is the Cathedral at Canterbury in the United Kingdom. Impressive, isn't it?



Notre Dame in France...



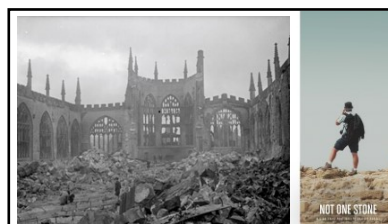
This one is in New York City



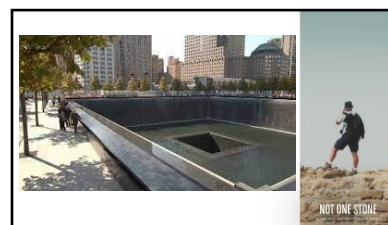
I'm not exactly sure where this one is, but it looks impregnable.



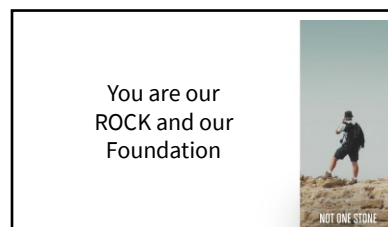
Oh, but...wait. That couldn't really happen, could it?  
Why would anyone want to destroy such a holy place?



Does anyone know where this is? This is the site where the World Trade Center stood, now a memorial to the thousands lost in the terrorist attacks on 9-11-2001.



Please pray with me:



*Lord, may the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all of our hearts, be acceptable to you, for YOU are our ROCK, and our foundation.*

In what do you put your hope? I posed that question on PVCC this week, and the common answer seems to be, “In God, of course!” But, really, is that always our answer?

The last several months, we put our hope in social distancing, masks, and at last, vaccines. I’m a big proponent of vaccines – I got my Covid shots, I’ve planned my booster, and my flu shot. Our kids had all the regimen of vaccines as they grew, and John and I updated our tetanus before we moved here. But isn’t it still possible I may get ill anyway?

Some of us have built our identity, and therefore our security, around our vocation, our talents, where we live, who – we – vote for.

Even -- where and how we worship.

I hope I put my identity in Who I worship.

Two weeks ago, we were reminded how to love, in Mark 12, where Jesus and the scribe quoted from Deuteronomy. As followers of Christ we love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and we love our neighbor by putting their needs ahead of our own. This is the core of Christian discipleship.



Last week we were called to love humility, and to hold our possessions and our lives lightly, so we can be ready to give anything at a moment in an act of giving as worship. This is the core of Christian service.

Today, Jesus points out that the strongholds of power that so impress us will NOT last.

I'm sure that all the adults in this room remember where they were when the Twin Towers fell twenty years ago. Do you remember the shock? The disbelief? We couldn't fathom that the buildings were gone, the people gone, our nation's sense of security, gone. For days and weeks, we walked around in a daze, didn't we? And then, resilience took over, faith took over. Acts of kindness spread across the country and across the world as humanity declared, "We won't lose hope!"

Hannah found hope. The Old Testament lectionary reading for this week was 1 Samuel Chapter 1. Hannah, childless, prayed in despair in the temple. Her husband loved her, but his other wife had children, and Hannah longed for a child. The other wife taunted her, Hannah's empty arms taunted her, and she wept aloud as she prayed. The priest Eli had pity and said, "May the God of Israel grant the request you have asked of Him." From that moment, Hannah believed, and had hope. The Bible tells us: "Then she went back and began to eat again, and she was no longer sad." (1 Samuel 1:18) What was the foundation of her hope? It must have been her trust in the God she was so determined to pray to!

If you turn with me to our reading in Mark 13:1, we can explore this hope in God; actually, let's glance at the end of chapter 12. Remember, just before Jesus and his disciples left the Temple that day, they were witnesses to the hope the widow had, giving everything she had for God's glory; the Bible reads, "all she had to live on," or, "her whole living." This is trust – in God, and in the things of faith God had established with God's children so long ago when the Israelites were told to take care of widows.

At the beginning of chapter 13, as they walked out through the majestic gates of the Temple, the disciples were already distracted -- misled by the seeming permanence and strength of a building made by the hands of men! They already lost sight of the message! My first reaction reading that was, "How can they be so dense! Jesus just told them it's better to put your whole living in God's hands, and now they're impressed by stones?"

But isn't that typical of our human character? How many of us will leave worship today all fired up and in love with God, then yell at our football team in an hour or so? Or argue with someone's political Facebook post tomorrow? Or weep over a news story of another Covid death, or another shooting, or another war casualty.

Jesus told the disciples, “Yes, look at these big buildings. But they will all be destroyed. Not one stone will be left on another (Mark 13:2)” All these symbols of human might are, actually, vulnerable. We saw that with the World Trade Center. And Jesus was right, the Temple in Jerusalem did not stand. The Roman army destroyed it in 70 AD. And the Roman empire in turn fell in 476.

But, Jesus’ disciples could not see that. They asked for a sign to look for so they would know when it was about to happen. Instead, Jesus had this answer: “Don’t let anyone mislead you, for many will come in my name, and will deceive many. And you will hear of wars, but don’t panic.”

Um...“Don’t panic? War seems like a reason to panic, Jesus, how can we not panic?”

But He has more to say: “Nation against nation, kingdom against kingdom. Earthquakes, famines. But this is the beginning of the birth pains, there is more to come.”

Jesus is asking the disciples and us to look beyond the things of the world as they are now. Not to put our hopes in these realities, because none of it was made to last forever. Nations and kingdoms and all their structures will fall, but we are called to look forward to a kin-dom, the Kingdom with a capital K that unites all people of all nations under the One Lord who created everything. The Kin-dom that will last.

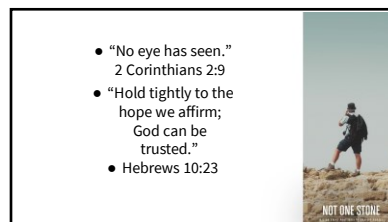
Notice Jesus’ words in verse 8: “This is the beginning of the birth pains – there is more to come!”

I used to think those words were about all the apocalyptic mess that would precede the second coming of the Messiah. That stuff in Revelation that is so hard to understand. The Left Behind books. But I see it differently now. I remember the beginning of birth pains. It’s scary, especially the second time around when you know what’s coming. Birth hurts. A lot! But what comes after? This amazing miracle of life, with hopes, and the promise of potential.

Jesus tells us, Don’t panic! Look beyond the troubles of this world, and discover how to build on a foundation that leads to eternity! The amazing miracle and promise of eternal life!

Maybe you really need to hear this right now: whatever is taking up your attentions, or whatever obstacle seems to be in your way, or whatever power is overwhelming you, there is more to come, and

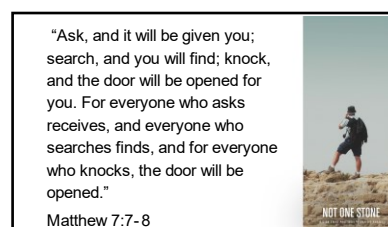
“no eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him (2 Corinthians 2:9).” Isn’t that beautiful?



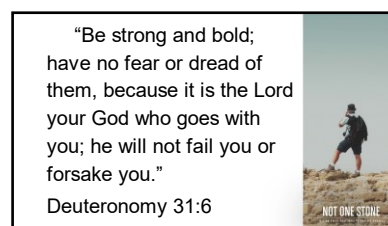
The Apostle Paul in the letter to the Hebrews reminds us: “Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep his promise. (10:23)” We can trust in God when the world seems untrustworthy.

Here are a few promises I found in God’s Word (NRSV):

Matthew 7:7-8      Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.



Deuteronomy 31:6 Be strong and bold [some versions say courageous]; have no fear or dread of them, because it is the LORD your God who goes with you; he will not fail you or forsake you.

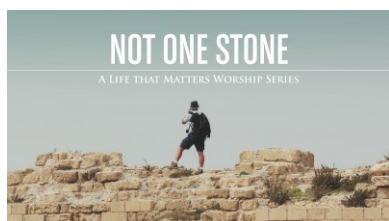


Isaiah 41:10 Do not fear, for I am with you,  
do not be afraid, for I am your God;  
I will strengthen you, I will help you,  
I will uphold you with my victorious  
right hand.

"Do not fear, for I am with you,  
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God;  
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I will uphold you with my  
victorious right hand."  
Isaiah 41:10



We hold on to hope; God can be trusted.



Yes, Jesus warns us to watch out who we follow. There are some who may seem to have all the answers, who want us to believe they offer a better tomorrow than the one we have now. One only needs to look at Earth's political history to see examples of unfulfilled promises. The truth is, there is no perfect world in this lifetime. Jesus says, "stick with me, because we're just getting started."

Yes, we use eyes of grace to see and appreciate all the gifts of living in this world. God loves beauty – that's evident every time we notice a sunset, the Northern Lights, a scenic landscape, the people we love, and the art we create. But we must keep the world's beauty in perspective, a gift from the giver of all good things, the Father of the heavenly lights (James 1:17).

Disciples – for that is what we are – disciples take the long view: we do not get wrapped up in the stones that we have built or that others have torn down, but we hold onto the hope that God has the whole word in God's hands. It is easy to see the trouble in the world. It takes eyes of faith to see and believe the Good that God has promised. And it takes God-styled love to help others see it too.

I want to draw your attention back to the prayer we began the sermon with. It's one John uses, and many Pastors I have heard over the years, an adaptation of Psalm 19:14:

"May the words of my  
mouth and the meditations  
of my heart be pleasing to  
You, O LORD, my Rock and  
my Redeemer."  
Psalm 19:14



May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing to you,  
O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

My prayer is that we all see this as a daily prayer. It reminds us that the LORD God is our Rock, the only One with the ability to redeem us from sin. May our words, thoughts, and actions reflect that trust and hope in the Eternal God.

Amen.

### **GPS – Grow, Pray, Study**

- 1) Grow. What human-made structures or systems are symbols of power and reliance for you? How can you replace those with a more complete trust in God's promises?
- 2) Pray. Are you able to put all your confidence in the future God has planned, even if it may not align with your plan? Allow yourself to rest in God's love today, and pray for God's wisdom to enter all your plans.
- 3) Study. Read Hebrews 10:19-24. How do these verses support what Jesus said in today's reading from Mark 13? Why is a solid foundation of trust in God's promises key to leading lives of good works?