

Be Steadfast

"Follow Me to the End" Series, April 26 & 27, 2025 | Mark 13:1-13

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How can anyone keep calm and carry on when bombs are falling?

Bombs literally fell on Britain during The Blitz of World War II.

In September of 1940, Hitler set out to bomb Britain into submission.

London made an easy target. Bombers came—roughly 250 at a time, usually by night.

As bombs rained down, people hid in bomb shelters and even under stairs.

After each raid, they put out the fires, carried away the dead, and rescued the living. The next day, they went to work. They opened shops, did their jobs, and prepared for the next raid. To the best of their ability, they carried on with life.¹

The British people had internalized an attitude Rudyard Kipling described in his famous poem, "If."

Kipling articulated a kind of Stoicism that refused to quit or be thrown into an emotional state by life. It's the stiff upper lip. Kipling wrote:

If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you ...
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn long after they are gone ...
... you'll be a Man, my son! – Rudyard Kipling's "If"

While this thought may have carried the British people through the darkest days of World War II without giving up, stiff upper lip Stoicism is not what the Bible calls for when bombs are raining down in life. Nor is it what Jesus is saying that He wants from us in Mark 13.

Today, many of us feel like bombs are falling.

For some of us, our children face crisis after crisis at school, and we're worried not only about their future but their friends and what they're doing on social media.

For others of us, our marriages are troubled. Or we're worried about bills.

We may be buried under health problems.

We may be concerned about the economy. Or about the wars raging around the world.

Or AI. Or the way our culture seems so divided. And at times opposed to God.

When we remember the past and think about the present, we worry about the future.

Are bombs bursting in air over you today?

¹ https://www.worldhistory.org/London_Blitz/

Jesus calls us to be steadfast.

In our Scripture reading today, Jesus started by talking about the present with His disciples, but He quickly panned toward the future.

He talked about troubling times ahead, wanting His disciples (and us) to be ready for them, rather than being caught off guard. He told them to endure to the end.

More than that, He told them to be prepared to do something constructive along the way.

And in telling them that He knew the future, He was giving them confidence. History isn't a random series of events trailing off toward chaos.

Instead, God is involved, moving history toward a conclusion. He involves us along the way and invites us to celebrate with Him in the end. Resurrection is the end.

It's much more than keeping calm and carrying on. Be steadfast, Jesus is saying.

How can we be steadfast?

Bombs may be falling.

How can we trust God, stay faithful, and be part of what God is doing in history?

These are not easy tasks. They involve more than keeping a stiff upper lip. But Jesus tells us how.

Jesus said to, "Look at the temple."

In Mark 13:1, one of the disciples pointed out just how grand the Temple was:

And as he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!"

It's really difficult for us to appreciate just how amazing the Temple in Jerusalem was.

It was massive! The outer colonnade could hold twelve football fields.

We have found some of the blocks used to make the retaining wall. They were sixty feet long and weigh over a million pounds!

Now, imagine Jesus saying that no stone would be left on another. (Edwards, 387-9)

Jesus left the Temple for the Mount of Olives. It was a scene we had seen before.

The Old Testament prophet Ezekiel spoke judgment on God's people and on Jerusalem.

In a vision, he saw the glory of God, which had dwelt in the Temple since it was built, rise up in the form of a cloud, depart from the Temple, and go to the Mount of Olives before disappearing into Heaven. **Ezekiel 11:23** says:

And the glory of the LORD went up from the midst of the city and stood on the mountain that is on the east side of the city.

After God's glory left Jerusalem, judgment and destruction came quickly on the city.

Here, we're seeing the same thing. Jesus is God's glory in the flesh.

He had been in Jerusalem, in the Temple preaching. He found a complete lack of faith. Already, the leaders of the Temple were conspiring to murder Him.

So, Jesus, the glory of God in the flesh, left the Temple, and went to the Mount of Olives.

Then in verse 2, Jesus prophesied the coming judgment of the Temple and the religious system.

The Temple really symbolized the leaders of the Temple and the corrupt, legalistic religiosity they represented. Jesus pronounced that they and the whole city would be destroyed.

Why? Because they had rejected God and would kill Jesus.

It happened just a few short decades after Jesus' Resurrection.

A revolt by Zealots broke out in 66 AD. Initially, they were successful.

Then the Romans sent a massive army. The Zealots were barricaded in Jerusalem, and the city was torn by internal rivalries. Outside, the Romans tightened their siege, and starvation set in.

The Romans breached the city's defenses in 70 AD. They quickly took the city and burned the Temple. Almost nothing was left. Tens of thousands of people were dead. It was awful.

When would this happen?

The disciples' question wasn't just curiosity or just worry about the city.

There were some who thought that suffering would come before the Messianic Age.

They read passages from the Old Testament that talked about the coming of Messiah.

like **Isaiah 61:1** which starts:

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me...

Jesus applied that passage to Himself. It speaks about bringing good news to the poor and liberty to captives. Hanging over it all, though, was **Isaiah 61:2** about:

... the day of vengeance of our God ...

Deliverance would come, but judgment would come first. They heard Jesus' prophecy about the destruction of the Temple as a promise that the Kingdom of God must be close behind.

So, they asked, "When is all this going to happen?" They didn't just want to understand the immediate future but eternity, too. They wanted answers to the same kinds of questions we ask!

What does this mean to us?

It means that Jesus is not just talking about the past but about God's movement in the future.

He is telling His disciples that God is on the move and that He will be on the move.

There is more to come. And Jesus is telling them to be aware. Pay attention.

And now God has our attention. This isn't just a history lesson.

Jesus is telling us about the future. He's telling us about OUR future.

Jesus calls us to, "See the times."

Instead of answering the question directly, Jesus pivoted in Mark 13:5:

And Jesus began to say to them, "See that no one leads you astray.

Instead, of telling them when the Temple would be destroyed, Jesus warned the disciples not to let anyone lead them astray before the end.

But Jesus did give a list of signs of when the end would come.

He said that there would be false teachers and false teachings that some people would follow.

He added that there would be wars and worries that more wars would be coming.

He talked about national and international strife.

And He said that there would be natural disasters, like earthquakes and famines.

For those who were paying attention, 1812 must have felt like the end of the world.

Wars raged across Europe, and the United States was caught up in the War of 1812. Russia was at war with Turkey. The Ottomans and Egyptians laid siege to Medina.

Those were just the beginnings of the national and international problems. It was a complicated time in world history.

There were natural disasters. The biggest earthquake in recorded history in the United States hit a place that would become Missouri. It was felt across a million square miles. Caracas, Venezuela, was hit by a similar earthquake, and 20,000 people died. 1812 was also the year that a Great Hurricane destroyed New Orleans.

There was hunger across Europe because of the wars.

If you lived in 1812 and knew this prophecy by Jesus, I'm sure it felt like the end of the world.

But Jesus was really warning us that trouble and trauma are part of life.

You could sample almost any year in history and find similar things.

There are always false teachers and teachings, wars, rumors of wars, national strife, international tensions, and natural disasters—including earthquakes and famines.

Jesus is telling us that trouble is to be expected. Trauma happens.

It doesn't mean that the end of history has arrived.

Jesus calls these kinds of events "birth pains." It's as if history were pregnant with the end of time and working to give birth to it.

When we see the times clearly, trouble and trauma won't stop us from being steadfast.

The first danger when we look at our times is that we'll panic. Bombs are falling from the sky, and we think that the sky itself is falling. When we panic, we are afraid. When we're afraid, we aren't being steadfast.

The second danger when we look at our times is that we'll get complacent. We'll think that the end couldn't be now. Bombs are falling, but they're not that bad. Jesus COULDN'T come now, this couldn't be the end, so what we do doesn't matter.

Jesus wants us to see the times clearly.

Trouble and trauma are always going to be part of our lives.

Trouble and trauma shouldn't distract us from God, though. They should make us HUNGRY for God's Word, THIRSTY for God's Spirit, and EAGER to see God work.

Seeing trouble and trauma clearly helps us to be steadfast.

He also calls us to, "Be on your guard and ready to testify."

Mark 13:9 is such a clear prophecy of the future that it reads like a thesis statement for Acts:

"But be on your guard. For they will deliver you over to councils, and you will be beaten in synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them."

The first followers of Jesus went across the street and around the world sharing Jesus. They were opposed by Jewish authorities and ended up on trial and kicked out of synagogues. They were opposed by the political authorities and stood trial before governors and kings. It's the plot of the book of Acts, but Jesus told us to expect it all the time!

Jesus told us that we should expect things like we are seeing in Sudan right now.

Sudan has been wracked by a civil war, and Christians are suffering. Local religious leaders force marriages, seize children, and make sure that Muslims who convert to Christianity are rejected by their families and disinherited. Both sides seize churches and kill Christians. More than 100 churches have been burned. Radical Islamist groups freely kidnap and kill Christians. Those who converted from Islam to Christianity are among the first targets.² But the Church in Sudan is steadfast in the face of persecution. They still worship. Still witness. But it's happening in more than just Sudan. And Jesus told us to expect it!

We shouldn't be surprised when we face resistance and persecution.

We want to offer salvation in Jesus Christ to everyone, but not everyone will accept Him. Some will accept the Gospel. Others will reject the Gospel. Some of them will work against us. And some of them will be hostile. Some even violent. We experience this in small ways when people find out that we are Christians, and they argue with us. Or complain about Christians. Or accuse us of being foolish. Or small minded. Resistance is to be expected. Persecution happens.

Some of you even know exactly what Jesus meant about the Gospel bringing divisions to families.

In some of your families, there are Christians and non-Christians. In some of your families, there are even former Christians, people who at one time followed Jesus and would have called themselves "Christian" but who have since turned against the faith. Sometimes they came to a different belief system. Other times they were hurt. Even now, there are some of you who have family members who argue with you about faith. They may forbid you to talk about God in their presence. They may even threaten to disown you if you mention the topic. Jesus said that faith would sometimes divide families, and He was right!

While we want to be on guard against persecution, it's more important to be ready to testify.

² <https://www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/world-watch-list/sudan/>

Resistance is a given. Persecution is possible. It can start with our families.
We need to be prepared. But the point is not to protect ourselves.
Jesus tells us to be realistic about persecution because it is an opportunity.
When we encounter resistance, it leads to an opportunity to testify to our faith.
We can show our faith by our actions and share our faith through our words.
We don't have to be eloquent either. Jesus said that when we testify to our faith, God the Holy Spirit will give us the words to say. God the Holy Spirit will help us and speak through us!
Don't be afraid. Fear paralyzes us. It keeps us from being steadfast.
And that's not the point. Fear isn't the point. Jesus doesn't tell us what to expect so that we will be afraid or hesitant. He tells us what to expect so that we might be faithful. So that we might lean on the Holy Spirit. So that God might work through us.
This is God's work, and we get included in it!

It all comes down to one word: *Watch*.

Throughout this passage, Jesus is calling us to watch.

Look at the Temple. See the times. Be on your guard against persecution.
It looks like Jesus is saying three different things, but He's not.
It's all the same word in Greek, the original language. The word is *blepo*.
The Greek word *blepo* is a rich word. It's a word that means putting your eyes to work. For having eyes to see.³ Jesus is telling us to have eyes to see. If we want to be steadfast, we need eyes to see.

When you're watching, you're ready.

You're not surprised, like someone who pretended that the fire alarm wasn't real.
Nor are you unprepared, like a student who refused to study for an exam.
Nor are you led astray, like someone believing a mysterious prince offering you a fortune if you'll just give him your checking-account number.
Instead, you are ready: paying attention to what's happening, prepared for what's coming, and responding in the right way.
You're following the Holy Spirit because He gives you eyes to see.

Brandon Moss heeded the word "watch" during The Blitz, and it mattered deeply.

German bombs had rained down for eleven hours on the night between November 14 and 15 in 1940. It was one of the most devastating attacks of the Blitz.
Brandon Moss was on duty that night after working a twelve-hour shift in a factory.
A house was demolished by a direct hit.
Knowing that there were people trapped inside, Moss started clearing a tunnel to them.

³ Kittel, G., Friedrich, G., & Bromiley, G. W. (1985). In [*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Abridged in One Volume*](#) (pp. 706-707). W.B. Eerdmans.

Debris was collapsing. There was a gas leak. Bombs were still falling. The other rescuers gave up, but Moss kept going. Finally, he freed all three people.

Then he went on to other houses. That's what it is to watch. And he earned a medal.⁴

That's exactly what Jesus was talking about. He is realistic that bombs are going to be falling. We want us to be watching. But in watching, we don't let the present paralyze us. Or the future. We faithfully work as we watch.

You, too, can watch.

You're watching when you're paying attention to the headlines without worrying. Bombs rain down in this world, but we know that the Kingdom of God is secure and victorious in the end.

You're watching when you're realistic about life. Bombs will fall, but we know that God is good, that He is with us, and that we have eternity coming with Him.

You're watching when you expect opposition. But you're not made bitter by it. Or deterred by it. Opposition is going to come, but that is a chance to show God's love and share God's story.

What is the key to being steadfast? Jesus says that it's watching.

When we're watching, we see the present clearly.

When we're watching, we know the future—even though we haven't experienced it yet.

And when we're watching, we are looking faithfully through the eyes to see that God the Holy Spirit has given us. In a sense, we are using the eyes God has given us.

We see His goodness. His faithfulness. His Kingdom. His plan unfolding.

How can we worry? How can we not hope? How can we not trust?

⁴ <https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/10-incredible-stories-of-bravery-during-the-blitz>