

## Sign of the Times, Mark 13:9-13, "Time to Be Resilient" 1/15/23

What is the difference between **LeBron James and Ben Simmons**? Both are elite athlete and physical specimens, both grew up playing basketball and winning all the awards, both came into the NBA with overwhelming expectations of superstardom **[Picture]**. Many said that Ben Simmons would become LeBron James 2.0. I'd argue that the biggest reason LeBron will go down as the 2<sup>nd</sup> best NBA player of all time and that Ben Simmons may go down as one of the greatest chokers in the game is one word- pressure. When it comes to the pressure on the court to make the shot, take on the responsibility of the team, to press on when going gets rough- one rises to the occasion and the other crumbles.

We've been talking a lot about how it's our **goal to build resilient disciples of Jesus in our increasingly post-Christian culture**. What makes a disciple resilient? Well I'll tell you this- it doesn't have anything to do with how talented or smart or charming you are. One of the keys to building resilience is this very thing- how we handle pressure in the Christian life. What do we do when we begin to realize that following Christ is harder than we thought? What happens when troubles and trials come from health issues or family or loss of someone or something we love? What happens when the pressure comes from trying to live out our faith in a culture that is increasingly set against the things of God and hostile to His teaching? What happens when we are criticized or marginalized because our beliefs are no longer acceptable? Do we rise to the occasion or do we crumble under the pressure? This is what Jesus is after in building resiliency in his disciples in Mark 13 in a message I'm calling **Time to be Resilient** [Title Slide]. He's training them so that when the pressure is turned up they rise to the occasion and keep moving forward instead of crumbling under the weight of it all. We are going to learn **Four keys to building resilience when (not if) we face pressure**.

Remember, we are in a mini-series within our study of the gospel of Mark on chapter 13 called **Sign of the Times**, examining the Olivet Discourse delivered by Jesus on the Mount of Olives overlooking the Temple of Jerusalem. As we said last week, what makes this chapter challenging to interpret is that Jesus is point to two future cataclysmic events- one in the near future- that happened in 70 AD (within 40 years of Jesus lifetime)- the destruction of the temple by the Roman Army, and one that is yet to happen which is the ushering in of the end of time, culminating in the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Jesus Christ. Now next week we will start to tackle more of the apocalyptic portions of this chapter. But for today in verse 9-13, his teaching is still fairly straightforward.

So let's dig in to verses 9-13 and see our first key to building resilience when we face pressure. **Key #1 Be Prepared for Pressure.** <sup>9</sup> **"You must be on your guard.** Interestingly, this is the same word Jesus uses in verse 5- Watch out, you don't get deceived. Blepo- In the same way they were to be prepared for the false signs of the end, they are to be prepared to face the pressure of persecution that will be coming their way. And knowing that it is coming is half the battle so that they aren't caught by surprise. Isn't that how it works? When I go into a meeting expecting to get some resistance to a decision I made, or counsel I gave, I am able to handle that situation

much better than when I get blindsided. And so Jesus prepares them, and tells them specifically to count on it from three fronts.

*v.9 You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. **The Religious Front*** This is persecution that will come from their own people, their own religious community in their own synagogues. And of course, this would first happen to Jesus in just days from this teaching, but then it also came true within months of Jesus' ascension. Remember Peter and John in Acts 4 stand before the Sanhedrin and thrown in prison for healing a man in the name of Jesus? Or Acts 6 when Stephen is brought into the synagogue under false pretenses and eventually stoned to death? How about the Apostle Paul who says, In **2 Corinthians 11:24 Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one.**

*v.9 On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them. **The Secular Front***- Again, Jesus sets the pattern- in his arrest not only does Jesus stand before the religious leaders, but before the state- Rome, under the Pontius Pilate. And so would his disciples. Paul and Silas in Acts 16 are brought before the Roman authorities in Philippi, beaten and thrown into prison, eventually Paul stands trial before King Agrippa and eventually is sentenced to house arrest, chained to a Roman guard in Acts 28. Of course we know in the first century the Roman Emperors horribly persecuted Christians. But the pressure comes not just from religious and secular fronts...

*<sup>12</sup> "Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. **The Family Front*** I can't imagine how painful this must have been for the disciples to hear. And this was not the first time the disciples heard this **Matthew 10 <sup>34</sup> "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.**

*<sup>35</sup> For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. <sup>36</sup> And a person's enemies will be those of his own household.* The point Jesus was making was that the Gospel of Jesus is offensive. The Gospels says there is only one Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. There is only one way to heaven- through Jesus Christ and his saving work on the cross. And becoming a Christian will call you to a radically different life following him as Lord. This can divide households. This was the history of the early church, many converts to Christianity were disowned by families, in some cases beaten or even killed, the church became a family for those whose families rejected them.

So what about us? **[Key #1]** You may say, "Well that sounds really hard and terrible for those poor Christians in the first century having to endure all that persecution and rejection from their families, but what does this have to do with me? We don't have persecution in modern times, right? We don't have emperors throwing us to lions. We have rights, we can believe whatever we want without fear of someone flogging us.

Let me share three ways this is relevant to us. 1- Just because we might not be seeing overt persecution in America doesn't mean it isn't happening in other parts of the world. On the

contrary **there is more persecution of Christians worldwide now than any time on the planet.** According to 2021 Watch List of Open Doors Ministry, Every day, 13 Christians worldwide are killed because of their faith. Every day, 12 churches or Christian buildings are attacked. And every day, 12 Christians are unjustly arrested or imprisoned, and another 5 are abducted.<sup>1</sup> 309 million people live in places with very high or extreme levels of persecution. Which means 1 in 8 Christians worldwide. May we stand in solidarity with our brothers and sisters around the world who face persecution like those in Nigeria facing the Islamic group Boko Haram and those in China who are put into camps for preaching the gospel. Pray that they continue to be resilient as they face incredible pressure.

2- Just because we don't experience overt persecution currently doesn't mean it will always be that way. We must be prepared as the disciples were. Revelation tells us that as we get closer to the end that the church will be persecuted more and more.

3- **We face subtle forms of pressure and persecution today.** Now some of what Christians call persecution today is really just backlash for being mean and a jerk. If you are snarky and unnecessarily combative on social media and someone pushes back or calls you a name, that's probably not persecution. But there are subtle and not so subtle forms today. Some of you I know face this within your own family who has rejected you because of your faith, insults you and is constantly combative. We used to have a young woman from a Muslim upbringing as a member of our church, whom some of you know and for her own safety I won't use names or specifics. For years she lived in fear of her father finding out that she and her mother had become Christians, who may use financial, legal or even illegal means to bring them harm.

Or we may face pressure through people bullying and attacking Christian values. For example- no employer would tell you that you aren't allowed to be a Christian or believe in Jesus. But, they may tell you that you aren't allowed to talk about your faith, or that you have to teach something that is contrary to a Christian worldview, or that you must support causes that you cannot morally stand behind. My brother worked in upper management for a large investment company and all the managers were asked to hang the LGBT+ flag on their office door in order to show they are allies. Which put my brother as a Christian in an awkward position, on one hand, he believed it is essential to love, show honor, dignity and hospitality to all people regardless of their sexual orientation or gender expression. And on the other hand, the flag would demonstrate support of an ethical position that he did not and could not support as a Bible-believing Christian. This is the kind of pressure that many of you already face or will face.

Certainly, the pressure will come from being mocked, marginalized, unfairly labeled because of our faith. If you are a Christian in DE public schools today and you are attempting to live out your faith with integrity, you will absolutely stand out and face pressure. Will you rise to the occasion or crumble? Being prepared is half the battle.

## **Key #2 Stay on Mission Despite Pressure**

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2021/january/christian-persecution-2021-countries-open-doors-watch-list.html>

In this warning of persecution Jesus also gives them a promise. <sup>10</sup> *And the gospel must first be preached to all nations.* Now, I understand this to mean that before the end of the temple in Jerusalem, that the gospel must first be preached to the gentile nations, I do not believe Jesus here is saying that every single people group on the planet has to have the gospel preached to them before he comes again. I believe Jesus' return is imminent, that is, that there's no checklist of things that need to happen first before he returns. So, what he is doing is encouraging the disciples by telling them not to be focused on the future destruction of the temple, or the pressures of persecution, you stay on your mission to preach the gospel. You will not be thwarted in your mission. This message will not stop with Jews in Jerusalem. He says, you will endure, you will be successful and have an unbelievable impact on transforming the world through the message of the gospel. He casts the vision of world-wide gospel evangelism that has continued to this very day. Despite the hatred, despite the persecution, despite the powers coming against them, the gospel is going to go to the ends of the world; they will not stamp it out.

Church, we have the same mission today [Key #2]- to introduce people to Jesus Christ and help them follow him. Every one of us is sent with this mission. This is our mission until Jesus comes back again. Will you face pressure? Yes. But what if you took on this attitude that the early church had- that the gospel must first be shared. Jesus didn't send me to your office at Chemours...he sent you! He didn't send Pastor Matthew to your Brandywine High School- he sent you. He didn't send Pastor Terry or Todd to live in your neighborhood. He sent you! What if you are uniquely positioned to Christ's representative for such a time as this? My friend Leo- "I'm a mortgage broker, but really that's just my cover. My real job is to be an ambassador of Christ in the real estate market." That's it. Resilient disciples share their faith despite the pressure.

### **Key #3 Rely on the Spirit's Power through Pressure**

<sup>11</sup> *Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.* What a wonderful promise he gives to the disciples. Don't worry, The Holy Spirit, will be with you, advocating for you, speaking through you, using you to share the glorious truth and reality of the Gospel. And this is exactly what happened- read the amazing sermon that Stephen gave before he was stoned, or what Paul shared before Festus and Agrippa and the countless other testimonies. They would not be left in their own strength, out there blowing in the wind...God was with them, lifting them above their own human strength with courage and Spirit-driven words.

[Key #3] The Spirit is still in the business of guiding and empowering us for ministry and mission, He's just waiting for willing candidates to use. Why is it that those closest to us are sometimes the ones we are most nervous about sharing our faith with? Sometimes easier with a complete stranger. When I gave my life to Christ at 18, I was terrified to tell my friends. I knew I would be ridiculed, not taken seriously. And on a few occasions I crumbled under pressure. But then one time on a weekend in Ocean City, MD with all my high school buddies. I was determined that when the opportunity came, I was going to be bold and I was praying asking the Lord for

strength and words, and I had my Christian friends praying for me back home. The first night, I was out on the balcony and one of my friends, out of the blue just says...so what do you think happens when we die? And so I launched into it, and he was like whoa...and then we go inside with all of our other friends, and Andy gets everyone's attention and says- hey, Nate just told me something really important about what's going to happen when we die, Nate tell them what you told me! 15 guys, ready to have a good time... It wasn't me in that moment. Some of us are so terrified that someone might ask us what we believe. Or that we might get into a spiritual conversation and not know what to say. When you trust the Spirit and you pray, he will guide you.

**Key #4 Persevere to the end of Pressure.** Jesus concludes this section- <sup>13</sup> *Everyone will hate you because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.* Remember- Jesus is speaking to the 1<sup>st</sup> century Christians who would be living during the time prior to the destruction of the temple and the widespread persecution, saying that even though you will experience extreme pressure, stand firm to the end, even if it means the end of your life. Because and here's the key motivation- Salvation, eternity is coming to you! Persevere because heaven is coming to you! Now, let's not misunderstand- You don't earn salvation by perseverance; you prove you have the real thing by perseverance. "Superficial faith will collapse under persecution. We don't keep our salvation by gritting our teeth and enduring; we demonstrate our salvation by enduring, through the power of the Spirit who keeps us. We have a salvation that's a gift of grace; it's authenticated in the midst of suffering."<sup>2</sup> And it's ultimately all God who does the persevering in us. Jude <sup>24</sup> *Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy...* It's all grace that keeps us, and holds us fast.

So what does resilient discipleship look like when we face pressure? Being prepared to face pressure. Staying on Mission despite pressure. Rely on the Spirit's Power through Pressure. Persevere to the end of Pressure.

What is one pressure that is testing your Resilience right now?

-Moral stance at work? Peer Pressure to shrink back from your witness? Lack of boldness? Is it a lack of focus on the mission? What will you do about it?

---

<sup>2</sup> John MacArthur, from Sermon on Mark 13:1-13