

## New Beginnings

11-18-2012

Mark 13: 1-8

*1 As he was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!" 2 "Do you see all these great buildings?" replied Jesus. "Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down." 3 As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John and Andrew asked him privately, 4 "Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?" 5 Jesus said to them: "Watch out that no one deceives you. 6 Many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and will deceive many. 7 When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. 8 Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains.*

Have you ever felt like “country come to town”? Boy, I have. There are times when I still do. As I was growing up, our family didn’t take many trips. Well, we went to see my mother’s parents, my grandparents in Charleston, SC on a fairly regular basis. But to go on a trip for vacation or something of that nature, we just didn’t go. I remember one of the first really big trips I took was with my church youth group the summer of 1964. We left Charlotte, and went north. We stopped in Charleston, WV, Philadelphia, Niagara Falls, Montreal, Canada, back down to Saratoga, NY, then into New York City for three days and a visit to the World Fair, down to Pittsburg, then into Washington, DC for two days, then into Waynesville, Va., and back to Charlotte. The trip took 14 days. Trust me; I was country come to town. I was blown away with some of the sights we saw and places we went. Now as an adult, I’ve been to a lot more places, yet, I still feel in awe of some of the sights I see as Maggie and I travel around. I guess the old saying, you can take the boy out of the country, but you can’t take the country out of the boy, holds true. Back in 82, one of my high school students won a state level skills competition. Along with his winning trophy, he qualified to go to the national skill competition to be held in Louisville, Ky. that year. So we went. As we were riding up I-77, we went through a tunnel. As we came out the other side, the young man asked, what was that? He had led a fairly sheltered life, had only been outside of Pitt County a few times, and had only been as far as Raleigh. So a tunnel was a new experience to him. He wanted to turn around and go through the tunnel again.

With travel being what it is today, can you just imagine how most of the disciples felt 2,000 years ago. Just being with Jesus in Jerusalem was one thing, but to be at the temple... From several accounts I read, most of the disciples had never been very far from Galilee. So to go into Jerusalem was a huge trip, but then to see and be inside the temple...wow, talk about country come to town. I don’t mean that to be ugly, but the temple was supposed to be if not the largest, then one of the largest buildings in the known world. Here’s the temple, sitting up on a hill overlooking Jerusalem. One article I read said the temple was 20 stories high and would hold over 1,000,000 people. Another source said it was over 400 feet tall and would hold only 250,000 people. Each stone was hand carved and weighed between 3 and 50 tons. The craftsmanship was supposed to have been so good, that you couldn’t slide a sheet of paper between the stones they fit so closely together. Knowing all this, is it any wonder we read in verse 1: **As Jesus was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him, “Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!”** Even having spent the last 40 years in the construction trades, with all the technology we have today, cranes to lift huge stones in place, saws that can cut with almost laser-like precision, I’m still not sure I can fathom a building like the temple. But in verse 2, Jesus shocks the disciples yet again: **“Do you see all these great buildings?” replied Jesus. “Not one stone here will be left on another; everyone will be thrown down.”** I can almost hear the disciple’s reply, really, come on, no way, what are you talking about. Yet we know that 70 years later, the temple did indeed come down. The Jews were trying to overthrow the Romans in the region, but the Romans prevailed and just for good

measure, to really show the Jews, they destroyed the temple. The symbol of Judaism which had stood for so long was gone. The Romans stripped all the gold and silver from the columns, walls and doors. Then they pushed over the stones. Only the largest stone remains. Today that stone is known as the Wailing Wall. This stone is said to be some 130 feet long and about 30 feet high; one stone. Two different schools of thought go with verse two. One says that Jesus is predicting the end of Jewish rule/occupation of the temple while the other school says that Jesus is predicting the end of time. I'm not a biblical scholar and don't profess to know which one is supposed to be correct. We do know that some of the disciples thought about what Jesus had said and later that evening they began to ask questions. Listen to verses three and four: **As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John and Andrew asked him privately, "Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?"** Once again, signs for what, the end of Jewish occupation of the temple or signs that the Jews will no longer be God's chosen people, or signs that the end of the world is coming? Listen to how Jesus answered them: verses five through eight: **Jesus said to them: "Watch out that no one deceives you. Many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and will deceive many. When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains.** That's scary stuff, war, famine, earthquakes. How many false prophets have come and gone, claiming to be Jesus or God. Remember Jim Jones and all his followers who drank the "cool-aid" because he told them to drink it. How many wars have humankind been through in the last 2,000 years? And of those wars, how many have been fought over religion? World War I was supposed to be the war to end all wars, yet, twenty years later, we had World War II. Those two wars weren't religious wars, but they were nation against nation. How many wars have there been since World War II; Korea, Viet Nam, Grenada, Iraq, Afghanistan, the 6-day war in 1967, and I've probably missed some, yet, here we are. How many earthquakes have there been in the last 2,000 years. And of those earthquakes, how many caused tsunamis? How many people died several years ago when the tsunami caused by the earthquake hit the Asian coastline? Christ mentioned famine; how many people are dying of starvation daily. Is the end of the world near? According to the Mayan calendar, December 21, 2012 is when the end is supposed to happen. Really? I think I'll see you all here on Sunday morning December 23, 2012 and then again on the 24<sup>th</sup> at our Christmas Eve Candlelight Service. I feel real confident in that. Jesus goes on in the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter and speaks about the end of time, but makes this statement concerning when it will happen; listen to Mark 13:32-33, **"But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come.**

I personally think that Jesus Christ knew just how much turmoil was going to happen in the years following his crucifixion. I think He knew as the world helped give birth to a new way of life through belief in Him, that as the world helped give birth to a new religion, Christianity, there would be pain and suffering. He said so in the last part of verse eight: **These are the beginning of birth pains.**

We here at Hooker Memorial Christian Church are facing a new beginning, a new birth. We are between pastors. I am here strictly as an interim. But one of the things I hope to do is prepare us as a congregation to work together to grow this church. When our new pastor is called, I hope whoever that may be, he or she will come into a vibrant congregation who wants to glorify God and spread the Good News of Jesus Christ. I've been attending church here for fourteen years. And I've heard stories about how large we used to be, about how vibrant we used to be, how active we used to be, about how we visited, how we took care of each other, how big the youth group used to be, how big the choir used to be, about how we had an average attendance of 125 to 130 on any given Sunday. And I don't doubt any of that information. All that being said, something has changed, and I don't know what it is. I know when I started attending here we were only averaging 80 to 85 on any given Sunday. That decline has continued. Since February, we have only averaged 64, and that includes the children in worship and Wonder and in the nursery. I would like to see the trend of the last fifteen years reversed. During the last three years a lot has happened in this church. We disbanded our board and developed a

Transition Team. This congregation voted to allow that to happen. We did away with our by-laws. Our Elders were reduced to people who pray over the elements on Sundays and our Deacons passed out the elements and took up collection. I'm not sure we as a congregation saw either group as much more than that. I'm not sure we saw their duties as much more than that. Many new and different things have happened since February. A newly formed By-laws committee, met together and re-wrote our By-Laws. The Transition Team and the by-laws committee, met many different times, reviewed and discussed the draft copies and after numerous re-writes, presented a new set of By-Laws to you the congregation for approval. You approved them. We now have a new Board of Directors in place and the transition team has been disbanded. We have a new slate of Elders and Deacons. I am meeting monthly with the Elders and with the Deacons. We are working together to revitalize this church. We need your help. We are studying the books, Your Calling as an Elder and Your Calling as an Deacon. It is my hope that by studying these books each group will recognize their place in the church and begin working together to increase the spirituality of this congregation. One of the things that has come about as a result of our elders meetings and from the study of this book, is the Sunday morning Prayer Circle you see each Sunday Morning before our worship service starts. Myself, as pastor, the Elders, and the Lay Leader meet in front of the church and pray. As long as I'm serving as your pastor, we will continue this. Daily I pray for this church. I hope each of you are doing the same. I believe this church is in a re-birth process. And as with any birth, there will be pain. Just ask any woman in here if birth is a painless process. The answer is no. Birth and re-birth is painful. We are going through some of that pain right now. People are getting upset with each other. Some people have left this church and started attending other churches. Some have just left. Feelings have been hurt. Our congregation is shrinking. It is painful. But in order to survive, this is necessary. If this church is to grow and be successful, we each must get involved. I can hear some of you now, oh, I'm just too busy with work and with the kids, I really don't have time. If you decide to make your spiritual life and your church a priority, then you will make time. Put God at the top of your priority list, not in the category "if I don't have anything else to do, then I'll get involved, then I'll go to Sunday School, then I'll serve as a ...you fill in the blank. And I don't need to hear, Oh, I'm too old to get involved. I can't get around like I used to, I have already done my time, it's time to let the younger crowd do some things. Baloney, you can get involved. You must get involved. If you are physically unable to do anything else, you can pray. Sit right there in your easy chair at home and pray. Everyone who attends this church, whether you are a member or not, needs to pray, pray to God to help this church. Pray that as we go through the pains of re-birth that God will lead us, pray that God will show us what he wants us to do here at Hooker Memorial Christian Church. And if you are physically able, then be here and get involved. Bring your friends to church with you. Bring your neighbors to church with you. Come to Sunday School. Volunteer to work on a committee. There are many things you can each do to be more involved in the life of this church. Do you want Hooker Memorial to survive and flourish? Then get involved. I can't do it for you. Your new minister, whoever that may be, can't do it for you. Only you can make it happen; only you, with the help of God.