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**Sermon Series: Christ's Return:**

**Living with the End in Mind**

**To be used with Session 1:**

**Stand Strong to the End**

**Sermon Title Possibilities: Stay Strong**

**Scripture: Matthew 24:1-14**

**Connection with Unit Theme:** To complement the small group study "*Christ's Return: Living with the End in Mind*," this sermon explores how believers can stand strong in the midst of difficult circumstances. Though trying times may threaten to undermine our confidence and resolve, we can be strong by following Christ's instructions.

**Introduction:** In some fantasy and adventure novels, a wise character provides other characters with instructions and warnings in advance of some endeavor the characters will pursue. As those characters proceed on their adventures and begin to encounter obstacles, they often recall what the wise person has said. This recollection strengthens their resolve to endure what they face.

In this passage, we find Jesus providing His disciples with advance notice about what they will experience. Rather than being part of a fictional story, however, Jesus discusses actual events with real consequences for His followers. In what is known as the Olivet Discourse, one of Jesus's five major discourses in Matthew, the Lord offers His disciples ways to stay strong when facing tough times.

### **1. Anticipate Problems (vv. 1-3)**

Jesus informs His disciples that problems will occur. Being part of the people of God does not mean that His followers will avoid experiencing difficulties in life. Jesus's disciples call His attention to the temple's buildings, surely awed by their splendor. The temple had been the center of Jewish religious life for centuries. Nevertheless, Jesus undoes any idea of the temple's permanence by explaining that it would be destroyed, with even the stones being pried apart. These words would be fulfilled in the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

Disastrous circumstances are not limited to the lives of Jesus's earliest followers. We can look back on our own lives and recall when the foundations of things we love have been shaken. Knowing that we will face problems along our journey helps us not to be surprised when they arise.

### **2. Avoid Panicking (vv. 4-8)**

In response to the disciples' question about the timing of the temple's destruction and His return, Jesus discusses more problems that they will face. People will deceive others and engage in wars against one another, He says. Natural disasters such as famines and earthquakes will also be prevalent.

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Jesus does not warn His disciples of these events to scare them. In fact, He tells them not to be alarmed. These occurrences are not the end of all things, but rather are the beginning of labor pains. Labor, while often difficult, signals that something new (and good) is on the way.

When we witness devastation in our own lives or in the lives of others, we may be prone to panic. We need not do so, however, as we realize that God has promised never to leave or abandon us (Hebrews 13:5).

### **3. Always Persevere** (vv. 9-14)

While Jesus's pronouncements have been general so far, He now turns to the persecution that His disciples will face personally, including martyrdom. He says that betrayal, deception, and lawlessness will thrive and even seem to prevail. But there still is good news. Those who endure to the end will be saved and the gospel will be proclaimed throughout the world.

In times of difficulty, we need reasons for hope. Throughout the ages, Christians have endured ridicule and persecution for their faith. The world's system often looks like it is winning, but this will be short-lived. Our responsibility is to prayerfully endure in the meantime. We also have the awesome responsibility and privilege of sharing in the work of proclaiming the gospel to the world before the end comes.

**Conclusion:** When trials come, we must resolve to stay strong in our commitment to Christ. Fear, panic, and worry may be natural responses to calamity, but we as believers have been given supernatural power by the presence of the Holy Spirit inside of us. Through this power we can continue sharing the gospel with others, knowing that God is with us.

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