

Text: Mark 13

Big Idea: Watch! Jesus is coming and we don't know when!

INTRODUCTION

- The **Islamic State** of Iraq and Syria continues its rampage of execution, torture, mutilation, kidnapping, ethnic cleansing and other atrocities. Christians there who do not flee, must convert, pay a heavy tax, or die by the sword.
- The **Ebola** outbreak of this year has now infected and killed more people than all other past Ebola outbreaks combined. The disease's spread seems to be growing exponentially. Thousands of people have been infected with over half dying as a result of the disease.
- Recently there was the conflict between **Israel and Hamas**. Part of Hamas charter is to destroy Israel and all Jews. They exist to reign terror to their neighboring country. Over 2000 people were killed and over 10,000 injured in their conflict, mostly civilians.
- **Russia** is flexing its muscle in the Ukraine, the Arctic, and spending huge amounts of money on its military.
- Here in our country we have the overwhelming rise of **homosexuality** and all sorts of sexual immorality.
- There always seems to be an **earthquake, hurricane, tsunami**, etc..

When these things happen, Christians being to speak about the end times. People start talking about oil, the nation of Israel, the spread of Islam, and what this means for the end. **Illustration:** In fact, a friend called recently, mentioning some of these things and said, "**Tim, do you think this is the end?**"

Is this the end? What does the Bible say about this? What does Jesus say?

Usually when the end of time is discussed. We plot charts and graphs of rapture, tribulation, millenium, armageddon, new heavens, new earth, etc. Much ink has been put to paper to argue for **pre, post, or amillennial**. Then there is **pre-tribulational rapture**, don't forget the **mid-tribbers**, **post-tribbers** or **pre-wrath** tribbers. I'm sure many of these views are represented in this congregation this morning. ~~That is why our statement of faith encompasses these view points and states, "We believe in the personal, bodily and glorious return of the Lord Jesus Christ, in the resurrection of the just and unjust; in the eternal blessedness of the redeemed and in the judgment and conscious eternal punishment of the wicked."~~

I'm not here this morning to **argue for a particular eschatology** (doctrine of the last things). I'm here to take the point of Mark chapter 13 and make it the point of the sermon. While we can put Mark 13 together with Scriptures in Revelation, in Daniel, and other prophetic portions to paint a picture of what the Scriptures say about the end times, today we're looking at Mark 13 and the thrust of **Mark 13 is not to answer all our questions about the end**, it is, as we'll see a call to watch, to not be anxious, to endure, to witness, to proclaim the gospel, to trust God, to be vigilant, to stay awake!

Application: We must be **careful not to be so caught up looking for signs** and trying to interpret signs that our eyes stop looking to a sovereign and holy God who has declared the beginning from the end, who rules and reigns and who will conquer all evil, who will build his church, who will redeem for himself a people from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation.

Introduction to Context

Jesus is in Jerusalem during the final week of his life before he is crucified. He's been in the temple teaching for a few days. As they exited the temple facility, his disciples were amazed at the stones and buildings of the temple complex.

Read v. 1. When was the last time you heard someone say, "What wonderful stones?" Some of the stones used in constructing the temple were amazing. Archaeologists have found stones in the foundation of the temple that are **42 feet long, 11 feet high, and 14 feet deep, and weigh over 1 million pounds!** Josephus reports that stones in the

foundation were up to 60 feet long! These rocks were the size of a tractor trailer! And weighed the same as 10 loaded tractor trailers! “What wonderful stones indeed!” These were merely the retaining wall.

Then there was the temple itself, rising to a height of 164 feet covered in gold and silver, crimson and purple, beaming in the bright Jerusalem sun. Josephus reports that the stones of the sanctuary exceeded in size the stones for the foundation!

Read vv. 2. Jesus prophesies the destruction of the great temple. The temple that was still be constructed over the last 50 years, Jesus predicts that it will be destroyed. Even those great stones would be thrown down. Jesus has already spoke judgment to the religious leaders, he’s withered the fig tree that produced no fruit and the temple is about to be taken down, stone by stone. 40 years later, Jesus’ words were fulfilled.

Read vv. 3–4. They sat opposite the Kidron valley overlooking the massive temple and asked a question of Jesus. “*When will the temple be destroyed and what will be the sign that it is about to be destroyed (v. 4)?*”

JESUS ANSWERS THE QUESTION

Jesus’ reply then fills the rest of the chapter. It is to this question that we now turn. ~~Jesus replies with 6 units of thoughts which likely correspond to the paragraph divisions in your bible.~~ We must remember this two part question that the disciples have just asked and Jesus is answering (v. 4): (1) when will the temple be destroyed? And, (2) what signs are going to signify that the temple is about to be destroyed?

I. These are not signs (vv. 5–13)

Read vv. 5–8. What is Jesus saying here? The disciples just asked when the temple would be destroyed and what signs would precede its destruction. Jesus says, there will be false Christs, there will be wars and rumors of wars, nation will rise against nation, kingdom against kingdom, earthquakes, and famines. But... the end of verse 8 says, “*These are but the beginning of the birth pains.*” And the end of verse 7 says, “*This must take place, but the end is not yet.*” That is, these are not signs that the temple is going to be destroyed.

Not only does Jesus say these events are not signs of the temple’s imminent destruction, he gives a series of commands or instructions. Verse 5, “See that no one leads you astray.” Verse 7, when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, “Do not be alarmed.” He’s calling them to discernment, to vigilance, to trusting in a sovereign God when the circumstances seem bleak.

Transition: So, rather than being led astray, rather than being alarmed, he continues in **verse 9.**

Read vv. 9–13. So rather than being led astray by false Christs, rather than being alarmed by wars and earthquakes, be on your guard. These things are not the end but rather the beginning of birth pains. Jesus then explains more about these birth pains, these things that are going to happen but are not signs of the end of the temple.

Not only is there going to be false Christs, earthquakes, wars, etc., but there will be persecution of believers.

(persecution of believers) **Verse 9** says they will be delivered over to councils, they will be beaten in synagogues, and stand before rulers for Jesus’ sake. **Verse 12** says that followers of Jesus will be betrayed by brothers, sisters, fathers, children such that people will be executed because of the betrayal of those close to them! **Verse 13** speaks of the hatred toward followers of Jesus!

(hope in persecution) In the midst of all this persecution, there are elements of hope! **Verse 10** says that the gospel is going to go forth to all nations, not just in Jerusalem or Galilee but through the entire known world! Persecution, rather than eradicating the gospel will spread it among all the nations. **Verse 11** says that when the disciples are standing on

trial, the Holy Spirit will guide them, giving them utterance, giving them boldness to say what must be said. So they are not to be anxious, God is with them! The end of **verse 13** gives a call to endure and a hope that those who endure to the end, to death, will be saved. There is salvation, rescue, redemption for those who do not forsake Jesus and the gospel, for those who bear witness before rulers who have the power and authority to kill them.

Application: So what is the response Jesus calls for in the midst of national and world turmoil? Don't be deceived, don't be led astray, don't be alarmed, be on your guard (v. 9), do not be anxious (v. 11), endure (v. 13). And continue to be witnesses (v. 9) and to proclaim the gospel (v. 10). The same admonitions are applicable for us today when we see turmoil in our world.

How should we respond to ISIS, ebola, and other world events? We must always remember that God is in control. This is not a surprise to God. Rather we need to grow in our discernment so we are not deceived and led astray from the truths of Scripture. We are not to be alarmed, but endure, persevere until the very end. Not only that but we should continue to be bold witnesses, proclaiming the truth of the gospel even when the world seems like such a scary and dark place—we should shine the light of the gospel.

[[Objection: Before we continue...what about the word “end” in **verse 7** and **13**? Put this here? Are these verse speaking of the end times? Or signs of the end times? Nothing in the context so far would suggest that Jesus is speaking of the end of the age but what are not signs that the temple is going to be destroyed in A.D. 70.]]

Transition: So Jesus answers their questions about signs that precede the destruction of the temple by saying all these things are going to happen, but they are not the sign that the temple will be destroyed. Then he starts verse 14 with “BUT:” The things mentioned in **vv. 5–13** are not signs of the temple's destruction, but **verse 14** is.

II. The Sign of the Temple's Destruction

Read v. 14. So here is the sign that the temple is about to be destroyed—the abomination of desolation standing where he ought not to be. When this happens, then those who are in Judea should flee to the mountains. What came before are the beginning of birth pains, but when you see the abomination of desolation standing where he ought not to be...here is your sign. It's time to get out of the city!

So what is the abomination of desolation? The text includes the phrase (let the reader understand) to urge his readers to decode the expression. The exact phrase is used in a prophecy in the book of Daniel. Daniel's prophecy was fulfilled when Antiochus, a Syrian general, who erected an altar to Zeus on the altar in the temple and sacrificed a pig on it in 168 B.C.

So the abomination of desolation (1) must have some similarity to this event by Antiochus since Jesus uses the same expression found in Daniel; (2) must be recognizable enough that those living in Judea could flee.

The likely event is reported by Josephus, the Jewish historian. He quotes the words of Ananus, no longer a high priest but in his old age he says, “Certainly, it had been good for me to die before I had seen the house of God full of so many abominations, or these sacred places that ought not to be trodden at random, filled with the feet of these blood-shedding villains.” He's referring to a group of Zealots who seized control of the temple, had appointed a high priest who was unqualified, knowing nothing of the priesthood. They were responsible for a number of atrocities in the temple. This took place in A.D. 67–68 and would have given time for people to flee before the Rome siege of the city in A.D. 69.

Objection (isn't this the antichrist?): Some say this is referring to the antichrist at the end of the age, during a time of Great Tribulation, but Jesus is talking about the destruction of the temple, and he also says in verse 30 that this generation will see these events take place! Jesus is telling his disciples, and the later readers of Mark's gospel what to look for, the sign, that the temple was about to be destroyed. ^{The one they are looking at}

Once the sign takes place, the abomination of desolation, then Jesus calls his followers to flee. **Read vv. 15–23**. Jesus gives instruction to flee, and flee quickly, for a great tribulation, a time of destruction is about to take place. It's common in prophecy to use hyperbole and such is the case in verse 19 when Jesus describes the tribulation during the time when Jerusalem is laid waste and the temple is destroyed (**see also verse 2**). The Romans who laid siege to the city in A.D. 69–70 so destroyed the walls that it was said if a foreigner came, they wouldn't even have known walls were there. History records, "Caesar ordered the whole city and the temple to be razed to the ground.... All the rest of the wall encompassing the city was so completely leveled to the ground as to leave future visitors to the spot no ground for believing that it had ever been inhabited." A million Jews were killed during that year of war. Many more would have perished it says in **verse 20**, but **God chose to shorten** the days for the sake of his followers who were trapped in the city and were suffering through this tribulation.

(Not the sign of Christ's return) Like in **verse 5**, Jesus warns the disciples in **verses 21–23** that if someone says the Christ is here or coming, do not believe them. **False christs and false prophets will arise** and deceive but Christ is not returning at this time. They are to be on guard against these false christs and prophets. **Jesus has told these things beforehand so they would not be led astray** but rather trust God and trust Jesus through this difficult time.

Conclusion: In this section, starting at verse 14, we see Jesus give the sign that the temple was about to be destroyed. The temple will be destroyed in a time of great tribulation so flee and flee quickly. During this time, **do not be deceived but be on guard**. Take **comfort that Jesus spoke of these things** beforehand and that **God has shortened this time** of trial for the sake of his people.

III. The Coming of the Son of Man

Transition: So Jesus just warns his disciples not to be led astray by someone saying, "Look, there is the Christ!" Up to this time, **Jesus has been clear in saying that the destruction of the temple does not coincide with the return** of the Son of Man and the end of the age. Now he makes this explicit, now he explains how he will return.

Read vv. 24–27. Christ will return after that tribulation (speaking of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple). It will be a **cosmic event and he will come in the clouds with great power and glory**. He will send his angels to gather the elect from all over earth and heaven. This is his return.

Conclusion/Transition: Jesus has answered their question about the sign that would precede the destruction of the temple. He gives them the sign amidst **warnings and exhortations** to persevere and not be deceived. He also lets them know that the **destruction of the temple is not the end**. It is not the end of the age when he returns. His coming will be a cosmic event and witnessed by all.

Now that he has spoken about the sign of the temple's destruction, **when are these things going to take place?** When will the temple be destroyed and when will he return?

IV. The Lesson of the Fig Tree

Jesus uses the fig tree to teach a lesson. **Read vv. 28–31**. Just like when the fig tree puts out its leaves, you know summer is near. When you see the sign of the abomination of desolation, you know the destruction of the temple is near, very near. In **verse 29** it says, when you see these things you know the temple is about to be destroyed. In fact, in **verse 30**, Jesus gets specific by saying that within this generation (about 40 years) these things will take place.

Difficulties. **Verse 29 and 30 have some difficulties**. Some understand **verse 29** as referring to Christ's return. When you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, that is, Christ is coming. Others understand **verse 29** as referring to the temple's destruction. When you see these things take place, you know that it is near, that is, the temple's destruction. **How do we unravel this?** The ESV and NASB translate **verse 29** with "you know that He is near" referring to the return of Christ. The NIV, NKJV, and KJV translate **verse 29** with "you know that it is near" referring to the

destruction of the temple. The reason for the difference is that the pronoun (he/it) is not specified in the original language but just the verb “is near” whether it should be “he” or “it” must come from the context. [It is not a Greek text issue]

I’m convinced that the KJV, NKJV, and NIV translators have it right here for a few reasons. (1) If it refers to Christ’s return being near, what are the “these things?” It can’t be the destruction of the temple since Jesus says explicitly that this is not the time of his return, don’t believe it if someone tells you it is. The “these things” also cannot be cosmic signs in the heavens since that is not a sign that Christ is near, but a sign that he is here! (2) Also, if “these things” signify Christ’s return then what does verse 30 says that Christ will return in the lifetime of the disciples! I’ve heard some crazy interpretations of this verse but it makes much more sense to see Jesus talking about the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70, the same generation to which he was speaking. (3) Also, Jesus says in verse 32 that no one knows the time of his coming. He’s obviously speaking of the temple’s destruction, the topic of this chapter in **verse 29 and 30**.

Conclusion: So to the disciples question as to the sign? Jesus answers, “the abomination of desolation.” To the disciples question as to the when? Jesus answers, in this generation, all these things are going to take place. And Jesus says something amazing in **verse 31**. “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.” Who can say such a thing but God alone?

VI. What About the Coming of the Son of Man

Transition: So Jesus answers their questions about the destruction of the temple but has introduced a new question when speaking of his return. So he turns to that question now.

Read vv. 32–37. Jesus starts by saying “But.” But concerning that day, not the temple destruction, but that day, the day of his return, no one knows when that will be. That is, there will not be signs of his coming. Only the Father, knows when the Son will return. So Jesus repeats over and over. Don’t focus on the time when it comes to his return, rather “be on guard! Keep awake!”

Jesus reinforces his teaching in **verse 34–36**. He tells a mini parable of a man who goes on a journey and leaves the servants in charge to continue working and to stay awake, watching for the return of the master of the house. So too Jesus is going to go away but will return. His followers should keep awake for he can return unannounced at any time.

Conclusion: Jesus exhortations to watch are many in this chapter. There are false signs, do not be deceived. There are signs that the temple will be destroyed, in this case, flee to the mountains. After this has happened stay awake, Jesus is coming. No one knows when he comes.

Application: So what does this chapter have to do with us? Why is this chapter relevant today?

(**Jesus’ words are true.**) For one, Jesus words did not fail. His word, his prophecy came true. Within 40 years, within that generation that Jesus spoke to what he said about the destruction of the temple took place. The great stones were thrown down, it was a terrible time of tribulation. He gave his followers a sign to know when the temple was about to be destroyed and warned them not to be deceived by other things that are not signs of the temple’s destruction. Again, the words of Jesus and the words of Scripture prove true. The gospels, Matthew, Luke, and Mark which all record this teaching were written before the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. This is an amazing example of a detailed prophecy told beforehand that is fulfilled perfectly. Jesus’ words are true. The Scriptures are true. The gospels are accurate in every detail. Heaven and earth will pass away, but Jesus’ words will not pass away. This is relevant today as it should increase our trust in his word.

(**His return is not yet.**) The second thing that is meaningful here for us today. Jesus’ return is still to come. He told of the destruction of the temple beforehand and he told of his return as well. Unlike the destruction of the temple, Jesus does

not give us a sign of his return, but rather says that no one knows. Instead we are to be on guard and keep away. He says “stay awake” 4 times in last few verses of the chapter. This is for us today. Stay awake. Do not let the fact that 2000 years have passed let you think that he’s not coming. Don’t fall asleep, don’t fall away, keep watching, keep working, keep waiting, Jesus is coming! Much is made of timelines and charts that we sometimes do not make much of what Christ makes much of—stay awake! He is coming again!

CONCLUSION

What if it was today? What if Jesus returned today? Would you be gathered by the angels into the safety of the arms of Jesus or will you remain to drink from the cup of God’s wrath that is poured out on any and all who did not bow the knee to Jesus Christ in repentance and faith. That first generation was to watch for the abomination of desolation. We are just told stay awake. To not be found spiritual sleeping or unprepared for the return of the king.

If you are unsure what would happen if Jesus returned today you need to get sure. The time is now to make peace with the King of kings and Lord of lords. Jesus came into this world 2000 years ago to give his life as a ransom for many. To pay our sin-debt that we can never repay. In fact, our sin-debt has earned us a lifetime in hell. Jesus spoke about hell to lovingly warn us of the terrible consequences we’ll suffer if we die in our sins. Jesus is coming again, not to give his life again, but he is coming to conquer, he is coming to rule, he is coming to bring destroy all evil. His coming has been delayed because God is being gracious to you. He’s giving you and this world time to be reconciled to him. The world is experiencing the grace of God right now by having the judgment and wrath of God be delayed. But God’s judgment will not be delayed forever. It could be today. It could be tomorrow. It could be at any moment. Get right with God. Turn from your sin and selfishness. Turn from your pride. Turn from your greed and lust. Turn from these things and trust Jesus to save you. To save you from the penalty of your sin and to save you from the power of sin. He can change you today. He can save you today. You can be spared his judgment when he returns and be gathered up in safety by the angels.

For those who have made peace and are resting in that peace because of the precious Lord Jesus. Stay awake. Be vigilant in obedience, in carrying out his commands, in staying awake. Be on guard for false christs and false prophets and false teaching who seek to deceive. Be discerning in these last days. Jesus is coming! Trust his word. Trust his mercy. Trust the power of the gospel and boldly proclaim it while you still have time, while you still have life in you. Jesus is coming. Stay awake! Warn others!