

The Journey to the Cross, Part 13

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Date: 26 May 2019

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[0 : 00] Mark chapter 13, you'll find it on page 1019, if you're using a church Bible. And we'll read the whole chapter together.

Words spoken by Jesus just a matter of days before he would go to the cross. Mark chapter 13, and let's hear the word of God together.

As he was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him, And look, teacher, what massive stones, what magnificent buildings. Do you see all these great buildings? replied Jesus.

Not one stone here will be left on another. Every one will be thrown down. 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? 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.

[1 : 03] 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 beginnings of birth pains. You must be on your guard. You'll be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues.

On account of me, you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them. And the gospel must first be preached to all nations. 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. Brother will betray brother to death and a father his child.

Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. When you see the abomination that causes desolation, standing where it does not belong, let the reader understand, then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.

[2 : 16] Let no one on the roof of his house go down or enter the house to take anything out. Let no one in the field go back to get his cloak. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers.

Pray that this will not take place in winter, because those will be days of distress, unequalled from the beginning when God created the world until now, and never to be equaled again.

If the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would survive. But for the sake of the elect whom he has chosen, he has shortened them.

At that time, if anyone says to you, look, here is the Christ, or look, there he is, do not believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and miracles to deceive the elect, if that were possible.

So be on your guard. I have told you everything ahead of time. But in those days, following that distress, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.

[3 : 29] At that time, men will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory, and he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.

Now learn this lesson from the fig tree. As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near right at the door.

I tell you the truth. This generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the sun, but only the Father. Be on guard. Be alert.

You do not know when that time will come. It's like a man going away. He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with his assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.

[4 : 34] Therefore, keep watch, because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back, whether in the evening or at midnight or when the cock crows or at dawn.

If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone, watch. Muriel Spark, a 20th century novelist who lived in, or grew up in Morningside here in Edinburgh, wrote a book called Memento Mori.

And the story of that book involves a group of elderly people receiving anonymous phone calls repeatedly over a course of months where the caller would simply say, remember, you must die.

And we then hang up the phone. And it was interesting to chart the response of these elderly people. Some of them feared that voice. Others simply put it out their mind and lived in denial.

Others turned to anticipate their own death with a sense of peace. A different kind of artist, R.E.M., the music group, one of their early songs was called It's the End of the World as We Know It.

[5 : 56] And for them, to finish the title, they said, and I feel fine. I wonder if it's something that we think about at the end of the world. And if we do, what sort of reaction, what sort of emotion does it conjure up for us?

In one hand, I guess it's an uncomfortable topic for us to consider, but it's an important topic. Do we have that same sense of fear that some of the characters from Amento Mori had?

Denial? Perhaps even anticipation? Well, Jesus turns to teach on just that, the end of the world. So remember, Jesus has been on his journey. We've seen in the last couple of chapters of Mark's gospel that he's arrived at the temple.

He's condemned both the religious leaders and the worship in the temple for being far from what God would want. And then if we look at chapter 13, the first three verses, we see he's now leaving the temple.

The disciples, they're amazed at this wonderful marble and gold temple. They're really impressed by it. And Jesus announces ultimate judgment on the temple because the worship there is far from pleasing to God, a judgment that will fall in AD 70.

[7 : 13] And as Jesus' disciples are processing this truth, they recognize here is an event, the destruction of the temple, here is an event so huge that they wonder to themselves, will this signal the end of the world?

Verse four, tell us when will these things happen and what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled? And so Jesus is going to begin to teach for the rest of the chapter.

Remember, effectively, the world must end. And in this chapter, he gives both a sense of reality and a sense of hope for life in the last days.

Reality and hope too for facing the last day, the second coming of the Lord Jesus. You can find lots of books written on the topic of the end days and the last day, dates and times and speculation.

It's really important to hear Jesus on this topic. So that's what we're going to do. Before we really get going, just as a little side note, it's really important to get our timing right in Mark chapter 13.

[8 : 26] I wonder if you've had the experience in a holiday car journey, if you've ever traveled with children, and maybe you were that child who would ask, just after you pulled out of the driveway, are we nearly there yet?

You know the question. Usually, by the time that question is getting asked, there's usually still a really long stretch of the journey, sometimes a hard part of the journey still to go.

Often, if you're going a long way, you're not even sure when you're going to arrive. The disciples are asking, are we nearly there yet? Is the end of the world nearly here?

Well, Jesus doesn't give them a time. He doesn't say in so many years. What He does say multiple times, four times in this chapter is watch out, be on your guard, be ready.

And He says to them, and He says to us, our journey of faith, it may be long, and it may be hard and difficult. And we don't know when the end of the world is.

[9 : 26] So what Jesus is trying to do is He's trying to prepare us to persevere for that long, hard journey. He wants us to persevere in our walk of faith.

When we find ourselves under pressure, when we find that life is really hard, to find hope from Him. The timeline of Mark 13.

It's important to get this right because some of it is immediate. He'll talk about some things that will be fulfilled within His generation, but some of it is very much future. So in verse 5, all the way to verse 23, Jesus is describing the last days.

That's the period of time between the first coming of Jesus and the second coming of Jesus. So that's describing the last days. And what Jesus says is that these things that He's talking about, they're happening now.

Verse 28 to 31 are talking about the last days. And He's saying, some of the things that I'm talking to you about, talking to the disciples, they will be fulfilled in your own generation.

[10 : 39] Do you see that in verse 30? I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. So He's talking about the last days. These are signs of the end of the world. So you've got that time frame, but then there's also Jesus teaching on the last day, on the judgment day, on the second coming.

Lots of different ways the Bible talks about it. And we find that in verses 24 to 27. So there's events that lead up to the second coming, but then there's separate teaching on the return of Jesus.

And that time is unknown. It's unexpected. Verse 32, no one knows about that day or hour, only the Father. And so in light of these two timelines, Jesus is saying, watch out, be ready, be on your guard.

Okay, so let's look at the text. Let's look first of all at the last days. What is Jesus saying to us? He's saying to us that these last days are dark days.

And he gives us warnings and promises. So remember, this is spoken first to his disciples. So what I want to do is to look at the two warnings that are applied specifically to Jesus' generation.

[12 : 01] The disciples and those who would live at the time shortly after the death and return of Jesus to heaven. So verse 14 speaks about the desecration of the temple.

That's the first warning. When you see the abomination that causes desolation standing where it does not belong, then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountain. Now, in the Old Testament, book of Daniel, Daniel had visions about the abomination that causes desolation.

In short, something would happen to make the temple unfit for worship. Something would happen within the temple such that God would leave the temple such that the people would no longer be able to worship God in the temple.

Ultimately, it would be destroyed. Now, that happened in history, 168 BC, and Jesus is saying it's going to happen again. In actual fact, Jesus has said this has already been happening in his own day.

Remember people buying and selling in the marketplace? Remember the false worship that's been going on? God is not pleased with that. Bear in mind too that Jesus said, I am the temple of God.

[13 : 12] And how did the people of his day treat the temple? Well, many rejected and killed him. And so, Jesus is warning the temple is going to be desecrated and then destroyed.

And that would happen as Rome came to attack in 70 AD. So, that happened in that generation. Tied up with that, Jesus goes on to speak about the distress that would come following those events.

Verse 15 to 19 speak about distress. Verse 19 in particular, because those will be days of distress unequalled from the beginning when God created the world until now.

So, here is Jesus' warning of intense suffering to come. He's saying to them, don't waste a minute gathering your possessions. You better hope the weather is good because you need to run because suffering is coming.

Rome's revenge, as history would play out, would be terrible on Jewish rebellion. And there was a time of great suffering for the city of Jerusalem and the nation.

[14 : 22] And so, they are told to watch out. Desecration is coming. Distress is coming. So, those are spoken to Jesus' disciples referring to his own generation.

But he gives three other warnings that are more general that we see played out in life in our days, which are also the last days.

The first thing to pay attention to is the deception that comes. So, in verse 5, 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. And then in verse 21, at that time, if anyone says to you, look, here is the Christ or look, there he is, do not believe.

For false Christs and false prophets will appear. So, there are false claims. There are some people saying, I'm the Christ claiming the position of God and the honor of God.

[15 : 22] Or they're saying, Christ is here. The return has come. There are those who are deceiving the church of God towards false worship.

So, Jesus is warning of this dangerous deception that takes place in the last days. What does that look like for us? Well, maybe it's that teaching that we hear that says, well, ultimately, all roads lead to God.

All religions are equal. There's no absolute truth. So, it doesn't matter which God you believe in so long as you're religious. Taking away the unique place of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Or perhaps, it's the teaching that we hear that says, well, for me, Jesus is life. Jesus is my buddy. Jesus is my guru.

Jesus is whatever that strips us away from the revelation that we find in the Bible to the Jesus of one's imagination.

[16 : 28] Or it might be the teaching that you hear from those that claim to be Christian churches that denies the virgin birth of Jesus, that denies the atoning death of Jesus for sin, that deny the resurrection of Jesus, that deny that Jesus will return in glory.

There are ways for God's people to be deceived and so Jesus says, watch out. He says, stand firm in the truth.

Here's a call to us as a local church to remain committed to the Bible as the Word of God with full authority, to be committed to the gospel.

There's not just deception in the last days, though there's also disasters. Verse 8 makes that plain. Verse 7, also, when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed.

Nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom. There'll be earthquakes in various places and famines. These are the beginnings or the beginning of birth pains.

[17 : 41] These are not the end. These are signs that this is life in the last days. A survey was conducted in the UK asking people about their greatest fears.

Not phobias, they do separate surveys for phobias, but when it comes to those sort of big overarching fears. In the UK, we are afraid of international terrorism.

We are afraid of armed conflict. We are afraid of climate change. We are afraid of global pandemics that will sweep through the world. It's easy to be afraid.

You switch on the news and it's easy to be afraid. So there are disasters going on out there, but also we are aware of our own personal disasters.

Those heartaches that we have, those sorrows that we endure, those struggles that we have with our health or in our workplace or with family relationships.

[18 : 48] And it can be easy to give in to despair as the people of God. And what does Jesus say? He says, watch out. He says, stand firm.

He says, trust. Let me read from Psalm 46. How wonderful words. God is our refuge and strength and ever-present help in trouble.

Therefore, we will not fear though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea. The Lord Almighty is with us.

The God of Jacob is our fortress. That's what our trust and our confidence must be because deception will come and disasters will come.

And not only that, division will come. Division in the form of opposition and persecution. Verse 9. You must be on your guard.

[19 : 48] There's the warning again. Be on guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. Verse 12. Brother will betray brother to death and a father his child.

Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. All men will hate you because of me. William Lane commenting on this passage says that Jesus' life is the cruel prototype for his followers.

How is Jesus treated in the gospel of Mark? What have we seen so far? We've seen many people oppose him. Many reject him. Many be hostile to him.

We've seen that Jesus divides opinions. Jesus divides communities. Jesus divides families. And just as it was for Jesus, he says, so it will be for his followers.

It was Dietrich Bonhoeffer in Germany in the 1930s who said, when Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die. Die to self.

[20 : 58] There is a sacrifice involved in following Jesus. And here, we are reminded that Christians may face opposition from authorities and from our own families.

How do we see that today? We see it in state-sponsored persecution. We see it when community leaders surround and intimidate and destroy churches in different parts of the world.

We see it when Christians find themselves sidelined at work. When we feel the squeeze on our faith values.

Perhaps you know the experience in your own family of being the only Christian, of being misunderstood or mocked or feeling isolated.

division comes. There is a cost to discipleship. It's another reminder why membership matters because we need each other.

[22 : 06] This might be the only family that we have. Opposition is normal so we need community for strength. We just recently finished watching a documentary following the travels of a British adventurer called Levison Wood.

He was walking from the top of Mexico through Central America and he was just passing through, just about finished, passing through the Darien Gap, one of the most inaccessible jungle forests in the world and there he met some men from Pakistan who were journeying as illegal immigrants from Pakistan all the way to America and they'd spent days trekking through the mountains totally unprepared trekking through mountains going through these really dangerous forests because they were hoping for the better life the promised land of America and you know in so many ways that sort of journey well represents the Christian life there is struggle there is battle sometimes we feel like immigrants where nobody else understands us where our culture is so different from the people around us and so Jesus is providing realistic warning for us some of us are reading

Pilgrim's Progress this night a spiritual classic from a bygone age it's a great book to read for a reminder of the reality of spiritual battle Jesus is saying watch out watch out because in one hand for us there's the pull of the world that's telling us chase your best life now what Jesus is offering sounds really difficult so why not live for ease and leisure and pleasure watch out because there's also that internal war going on in our heart sin is defeated but still wants to fight wants to drag us away from God as John Owen the Puritan said be killing sin or it will be killing you and then there's the temptation of the devil constantly saying to us well look at your sin you call yourself a Christian and you did that or he'll point to your circumstance and say well look how hard life is where's this God who made all these wonderful promises or maybe just tempt us to look at the rewards now and forget about the fact that there is an end of the world that Jesus is coming there is eternity to look forward to the last days are dark days difficult days given all that is there any hope for us well Jesus says absolutely yes there is and he points us to it in his teaching first of all we have the promise that God works despite the darkness let's look at verse 9 in the middle of all this persecution

Jesus says on account of me you'll stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them and the gospel must first be preached to all nations so there's going to be people that want to destroy the church but God is stronger than that opposition and the gospel is going to spread maybe we feel that all the people around us are either opposed or apathetic to the gospel but you know what God is stronger he can change hearts and transform lives he will continue to build his church until Jesus returns so God works despite the darkness verse 11 we're reminded that God is with us in the darkness whenever you're arrested and brought to trial don't worry beforehand about what to say say whatever is given you at the time for it's not you speaking but the Holy Spirit so when you feel most isolated most opposed most persecuted remember the spirit is there God is there helping us to testify for Jesus helping us to stand firm in our faith

God is with us in the darkness and God calls and keeps us through the darkness verse 13 all men will hate you because of me but he who stands firm to the end will be saved and in verse 20 speaking about days of distress but for the sake of the elect whom he has chosen he has shortened those days this is a reminder that God is working in history for his church for his people God never abandons his people not one of his chosen ones will be lost we will be saved and remember Jesus is speaking these words while he's on that journey to save his own reminding us that trust in Jesus is never misplaced he is our only hope in life and death so we seek to stand firm trusting in our saviour so the last days are dark days but there is hope now let's look briefly at the last day the second coming let's look at Christ's return and again let's see warnings and promises here

[27 : 26] Jesus turns from signs that the end of the world is coming to drawing our attention to the end of the world itself there is a warning here that judgment day is coming verse 24 in those days following that distress the sun will be dark and the moon will not give its light the stars will fall from the sky and the heavenly bodies will be shaken this is Jesus speaking from the book of Isaiah Isaiah 13 and Babylon and then judgment on the nations because of their rebellion against God and his people and his purposes for their continued hostility and refusal to submit to God their refusal to honor God as king therefore judgment would come so there's a warning against unbelief and rebellion but there's also a word of hope because here is a promise that though the world is dying God will come back and one day will put everything right it's one of the great hopes of the persecuted church that

Jesus will come and bring justice in Jesus' day we've seen it throughout Mark's gospel many rejected him they denied his power and authority they said we don't trust you we don't want you and Jesus saying that attitude will bring judgment to make us recognize how serious this is imagine coming face to face with our queen as an example we're being invited to a nice fancy ceremony and the queen is shaking lots of hands imagine when it's your turn to shake hands with the queen and you turn your back on her face or you cover your ears so you don't listen to her nice words or worse still as she comes to shake your hand you turn and you slap her face what a shameful thing to do what a dishonorable thing to do but the bible says that's how by nature we choose to treat god and just as if we were to treat the queen that way there would be significant consequences so the consequences of treating our father in heaven shamefully will be far worse there is judgment and there is hell the bible says refusing to receive Jesus as lord and saviour so there is warning about the last day but there is also promise here too the promise of salvation that comes when the king returns Jesus's second coming the bible says will be totally different to the first verse 26 at that time men will see the son of man coming in clouds with great power and glory and he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens when he comes back it won't be quiet in weakness humility of a stable he will come with all power and glory and every eye will see him and what does this mean for his church for his people did you see verse 27 he will send his angels and he will gather his elect he'll come back in other words for his chosen ones the ones he loves the one he has died for he will gather them wherever they are heaven's earth he will gather them in a couple of days after this

Jesus would be talking to his disciples who were troubled about the fact that your hearts be troubled in my father's house are many rooms I'm going there to prepare a place for you and I'll come back and take you to be with me when Jesus comes back in glory he will call the elect to himself so we can enjoy his glory for all eternity that's the final goal of salvation to enjoy being in the presence of our God and our Savior to enjoy life in his kingdom to enjoy forever being children in his family to enjoy life of that wonderful feast that is spoken of to be the bride of Christ united to him in love forever the Bible is full of these pictures of security and love and joy and peace that never end to sustain our hope in the last days which are dark days there's one final watch out one final be on your guard from verse 33 to verse 37

Jesus tells that short parable a master goes away and the servants are supposed to be busy and then the master comes back at an unexpected time and the point is that the servants should be ready the master will come back they don't know when therefore they should be serving they should be showing him that honor now Jesus has very clearly said to us that he will return he will come back in power and glory one day and so the question for us then is will he find us ready he is the master will he find us ready for that day when we stand at the judgment seat of God are we ready for that day how are we to be ready we get ready by trusting in Jesus by trusting in his saving work by resting in him alone by recognizing that he is on this journey to save his own people that he's on the way to the cross in order to face the judgment for the sins of his people to secure salvation for his people by forgiving our sins so we can be reconciled to

God the last days are dark days but there is that final day coming a day of glory a day of honor a day that we love and joy for all eternity for the people of God so let Jesus determine how we think about the end of the world and it's important that we do to think about our own mortality and think about the return of Jesus and to be ready for that by trusting him now and forever let's pray together briefly without