

Christ is Risen! So Be Alert!

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We usually read the scripture reading right after this song. But I just need to give you all a heads up. This is going to be an interesting one today, all right? I don't know if you got a peek at the passage. It's going to be an interesting one.

And I'm so sorry. I didn't realize that we have the fourth graders and fifth graders in here. Because it's going to be a longer one, too. I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry. But last week, of course, was Easter Sunday.

And, you know, Jonathan, of course, he preached on Mark's account of the resurrection of Jesus. But to conclude our series and Mark's gospel today, we thought it'd be fitting to cap it off with a sermon on what happens next, what happens after the resurrection.

[1 : 06] So we're going to turn our attention to a teaching that Jesus actually gave before his crucifixion. But it was a prophetic teaching about what was going to happen after his resurrection and his ascension into heaven.

It's Jesus' longest teaching in the gospel of Mark, Mark chapter 13. Now, if you are new here, you have to know that the length of our passage this morning is way longer than we typically select to preach on.

And again, it's going to be a longer sermon. And I also promise you that we're not one of those churches that's always preaching about the end times and Judgment Day and the end of the world. But we still are a church that's committed to preaching what we call the whole counsel of God. We're still a church that wants to preach all that God's spoken and revealed in the Scriptures because we believe that all Scriptures are breathed out by God. They're inspired by God and that they're useful for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, and for training us in righteousness so that all the servants of God might be equipped for every good work.

So this means we're not going to shy away from passages that are unpalatable or unpopular or hard for people to swallow or even hard for people to understand. You know, passages like today, Mark chapter 13.

[2 : 18] Thank you, Jonathan. I hope you had a good spring break. But all this is to say we're going for it today, okay? We're going for it. I won't be able to address all 37 verses in what most Bible interpreters call the most difficult chapter of Mark's gospel.

But I do want to take it on as a whole and help us all get a better hold of it. But more importantly, I hope that the way I preach will help this text get a better hold of us.

And for this to work, this is why we have this insert in our liturgies this morning. If you could take that out. For this to work, I'm going to need you to pay extra close attention to the passage today, okay?

So grab those liturgies. And as the Bible teacher, Paige Benton-Brown, she likes to say, I want to see tops of heads, all right? I want to see your heads down, your noses and your eyes in the Word of God, immersed in the Word of God.

It's extra important for us as we address this long, dense, and difficult passage. Okay? That's my beginning stuff. Why don't we all stand now? And I'm going to read all 37 verses for us.

[3 : 23] This is the gospel of our Lord. As Jesus was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him, 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. Everyone 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. 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. You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues.

[4 : 27] 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 father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death.

Everyone will hate you because of me, but the one 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. Let no one on the housetop go down or enter the house to take anything out of it. Let no one in the field go back to get their cloak. Look 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.

[5 : 33] 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 Messiah, or look, there he is, do not believe it.

For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. 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. At that time, people 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.

Truly, I tell you, 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.

[6 : 45] 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.

It's like a man going away. He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch. 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 rooster 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. This is the gospel of our Lord. Praise to you, O Christ.

You can take your seats. Let's pray. Let's pray. Lord God, this passage is a hard one, but we confess that your word is true, and that your word is good, and that your word is life.

So would your Holy Spirit guide us this morning, not just to understand your word, but to trust it and to live by it? For Jesus' sake and for the world, we pray.

[7 : 57] Amen. All right, so let's just dive right in. You need a little bit of a helpful background as we get into Mark chapter 13, and what you have to remember is that what happens in chapter 11?

Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a donkey. He enters the temple, and then what does he do? He clears it out, right? He clears it out. He calls it a den of robbers.

He creates quite a stir. He overturns the money changers' tables, and he drives out all the buyers and sellers. And then from then on in chapter 12, you have a bunch of religious leaders who come to question him and test him and challenge his authority in and around the temple.

So you might say that coming into chapter 13 here, the temple had become a hostile place to Jesus. And you might even say that one key to understanding Jesus' whole teaching in Mark chapter 13 is to understand that he has come to make that temple obsolete and to challenge people to place their hopes somewhere else and not in that temple.

So now we come to chapter 13, verse 1, and it says, as Jesus was leaving the temple, again, this place had been so hostile to Jesus, and that in many ways Jesus had just undermined and discredited as Jesus was leaving this temple, one of his disciples, totally missing the point of all that's just been happening at the temple, one of his disciples says to him, look, teacher, what massive stones, what magnificent buildings.

[9 : 22] And he might as well have said, teacher, what a beautiful temple. Aren't we so lucky to call this temple ours, to be Jewish worshipers at this most magnificent house of worship? How befitting it is that we, who have the greatest religion and culture in the world, also have the greatest temple in the world.

I mean, look at those stones, look at these magnificent buildings. And for sure, these were massive stones. Think like shipping cargo containers, all right, 400 tons each, beautifully stacked on one another.

And for sure, the building was magnificent. King Herod and Jewish people from all over the world had put tons of money into this reconstruction of a temple.

Its foundation was twice as big as the original temple that Solomon had built. And as the ancient historian Josephus recounts, it was covered all over with plates of gold of great weight.

And at the first rising of the sun, it reflected back a very fiery splendor and made those who forced themselves to look upon it to turn their eyes away, just as they would have done at the sun's own rays.

[10 : 23] So in one sense, the disciples, that disciple wasn't wrong. This was an impressive sight to behold, probably the greatest house of worship in the known world. But is Jesus as impressed by this temple as his disciple?

No. No, because he, like the prophet he is, he sees the temple for what it really is and what it will ultimately be, a mere architectural structure, merely built by deep pockets and a vain king, King Herod.

Just a place ruled by a Jewish religious establishment whose hearts were far from the Lord and a house of worship filled with religious people who couldn't even recognize the Messiah right in front of them.

That's what the temple was to Jesus. And so Jesus saw in this temple something ultimately doomed to crumble into a pile of rubble. In fact, the whole reason Jesus came, we know, from the other parts of the Scriptures was to be a better, more ultimate temple, right?

The perfect place where the fullness of God dwelt. The perfect and true meeting place between God and humanity. Not centralized in one little place in Jerusalem, waiting for people to come and convert to join him, but a person who by his spirit would go out with his disciples to the world.

[11 : 39] And so he responds in verse 2. He says, Do you see all these great buildings? Not one stone here will be left on another. Every one will be thrown down. And you have to understand how rattling this would have been to his disciples to hear this.

Because to the Jewish people, the temple was the centralized dwelling place of God, the very heart of the kingdom, the core of God's holy city. The temple was the religious, political, and cultural center of Jewish life.

It was the place from which God was going to establish his rule and reign over all the nations and vindicate his own honor and his people's honor. And remember, this is the second temple, okay? So it's not Solomon's original temple. This is the temple that was built after the Israelites had been returned to Israel after their exile in Babylon.

So it's not just the central place of God's presence, but it's a sign, right? It's a sign of God's favor. It's a sign of God's commitment to them that he would indeed keep his promise to them of an everlasting kingdom in the line of David.

[12 : 44] And now here the disciples were. They'd believe they'd identified the Messiah as Jesus of Nazareth, right? And they believed that the everlasting kingdom was soon to be inaugurated and

that such a grand temple was well-suited for such a long-awaited Messiah.

But then Jesus tells them that not one stone of it will be left on another. Jesus prophesies that this site that's so central to all of Jewish life and carrying all their hopes and dreams, this architectural structure that had been in construction for over 50 years up to this point when they're pointing out these stones.

And it wouldn't be completed for another 30 years. Jesus is saying, it's all going to come crashing down. And so in verse 3 and 4, four of the disciples approach Jesus because they absolutely need to know more details.

And they ask him in verse 4, actually they don't ask him, they command him, tell us, when will these things happen? Specifically, when will the temple be destroyed? And they ask, and what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?

All right, and these are some super loaded questions. Because see, in the disciples' minds, yes, their question is about the end of the temple, but as Jewish students of the scriptures, in their minds, the end of the temple was also the same thing as the end of the world.

[14:01] Remember, the temple was a central feature in their world, so for the temple to be destroyed, for the dwelling place of God and his people to be torn down, that would signal the end of the world. And not only that, but notice how they phrased their second question, what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?

There's this prophecy in the book of Daniel, Daniel chapter 12, and it's about the end of the world. And Daniel has this vision of a man asking a very similar question, and this man asks, how long will it be before these astonishing things are fulfilled?

And then Daniel hears the answer. Another man cries out, it will be for a time, listen, when the power of the holy people has finally been broken.

All these things will be completed. When the power of the holy people has finally been broken, all these things will be completed. So in short, the disciples understand Jesus' prophecy about the temple to be more than a prediction about some building, they understand it to be a prophecy about the last days.

And that's why the disciples don't just ask, when will this happen? When will the temple be destroyed? But when will these things, plural, happen? What will be the sign that they will all be fulfilled?

[15:18] They have a lot of things in mind when they're thinking about the destruction of the temple. And it's even clearer if you look on page 805 in your pew Bibles, if you'd like, in Matthew's account of this discussion.

Matthew chapter 24, verse 3. In Matthew's more expanded account, he puts it like this when they ask the question, when will this happen?

And what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age? So that's what's on their mind when they're asking this question. And that's where the difficulty of this passage really comes in. It's in how to understand Jesus' response to this loaded question. When Jesus responds to their questions with a list of a whole bunch of things that will happen, the question is, when did or when does that actually happen?

Like what time period was he referring to? Especially since we know that the temple was destroyed in 70 AD. And you know what? First, I was going to share with you the view that I felt most comfortable with.

[16:22] But then yesterday morning, I listened to one more talk about this chapter. And it was with a different view. And I was like, I don't know, maybe I'm wrong. I'm not quite sure.

And so I spent yesterday afternoon trying to figure out how to concisely summarize maybe three of the most popular views for you. But then I realized that it was going to take way too much time and distract us from what I think Jesus is most importantly wanting us to have our attention focused upon.

So all I'm going to say, and we can talk about this offline, come to my equipping class the last Tuesday of every month. We can talk about that more. But all I'm going to say is that some people, some people think that what is predicted from verses 5 to 31, all right, again, tops of heads, tops of heads, verses 5 to 31.

Some people think that all that's predicted there, about all the wars and the earthquakes and the famines and persecution and false prophets and the gospel being preached to all the nations and

the tribulation and the abomination that causes desolation, leading people to flee to the mountains, and the destruction of the temple and the sun and the moon, darkening stars falling from the sky, the son of man coming in clouds with great power and glory, and the angels gathering all God's people from the ends of the earth, and this whole generation not passing away before all these things happen.

Some people think that this is all in the future. You might call that the futurist view or the dispensationalist view, particularly conservative American evangelicals, Moody Bible Institute, Dallas Theological Seminary, guys like Billy Graham, Chuck Swindoll, John MacArthur, Charles Stanley, Tony Evans.

[18:02] You may have heard of Hal Lindsey, right? And those famous New York Times best-selling books, the Left Behind series, Tim LaHaye, that's this view, right?

And while I probably would consider myself a theologically conservative American evangelical, while I also grew up being taught this view, today I would say I actually find this the least compelling, the least compelling view.

Because the temple was destroyed, and a lot of this stuff already did happen by 70 A.D. And Jesus says in verse 30 that the generation that he's speaking to would not pass away until all these things happened.

And some people think, well, maybe he's talking about generations upon generations, not just, you know, beyond the time of Jesus' disciples, but the best Greek and New Testament scholars feel that that's kind of a dishonest reading, a twisting of the word generation, beyond how the word generation is used in the rest of the Bible and in the rest of classic Greek literature.

So it seems to me that you have to at least admit that a lot of this stuff has already happened by 70 A.D. at the destruction of the temple. Now there's another camp, they're called the Preterist Camp.

[19:17] I wasn't going to say that, but Jonathan dared me to use that word in this sermon, all right? But they think that all these things mentioned in verses 5 through 31, that they already happened by 70 A.D., by the time the temple was destroyed.

Even the coming of the Son of Man in the clouds with great power and glory and his gathering of all people from the four winds. And honestly, as I studied this passage this week, I actually became a lot more sympathetic to this view for a variety of reasons I can share with you later.

The top commentator on the Gospel of Mark, his name was Richard France. He was a scholar out at Oxford. He held this view. So does N.T. Wright, R.C. Sproul, Kevin DeYoung.

But that part about the Son of Man already coming, even if we take that spiritually and figuratively and believe in another physical coming of Jesus, it doesn't sit right with me.

I think it takes kind of some gymnastics to hold this view as well. And then there was the view that I was taught in seminary that some of these things did happen leading up to the destruction of the temple, but other things, like the Son of Man returning, hasn't happened yet.

[20:32] That's the view I was probably going to teach and promote, but honestly, I'm not really sure that one's right either. I think it takes maybe a less intuitive kind of lumpy, back-and-forth reading of this text.

All right, so that's the end of the sermon. No, but I think from time to time you need to hear that the pastor doesn't know. And that's the truth.

That's God's word to you this morning. The pastors don't know everything. And this was just a brief and broad sketch of some of the most popular views out there, but again, I guess what I need to admit here is, as your pastor, I'm not really sure exactly what Jesus was referring to here in Mark chapter 13.

But also as your pastor, I want you to hear that that doesn't mean what Jesus is saying here isn't important, or that we can just ignore his teaching about the end of the age, or that there is nothing we can hold onto and glean from these portions of Scripture that are more difficult to interpret and get consensus upon.

Actually, in this very difficult passage about the last days, there is still a ton of relevant, significant, and even profound truth here for us to trust and apply in our lives.

[21:49] The end times aren't some speculative Christian teachings that Christians are meant to bicker over or raise alarm about to manipulate people. Jesus' teaching on the end has incredible significance for the present.

And if you're here today and you're having trouble seeing the relevance of this apocalyptic end-of-the-age conversation between Jesus and his disciples, maybe you're here, you're not even sure if you believe in God.

And maybe you're not even sure you can believe there was a beginning or that there will be an end, even if the AI robots take over and wipe us out, or we wipe ourselves out with wars and nukes and consuming so much that we make this world uninhabitable.

Or maybe you're here and you are a Christian and you do technically believe that there's a beginning and an end, but honestly, you have trouble thinking that far ahead. You're just trying to keep your head above the water, right?

And the end of the age just seems so far, so distant that functionally, it seems just as irrelevant to you as to those here who aren't even sure they believe in God. Well, I'm sorry, I don't have time to give a comprehensive argument about why you should believe in the end of the age, but what I will say is that if we try to live as if there is no grand story, if we try to live as if there is no meta-narrative, no rightful ending, no one in control of the beginning or the middle or the end of the story, we will never live with a kind of confident hope, comforting peace, and convicted purpose that we all long to live with.

[23 : 25] See, underlying the entire Christian faith is the conviction that we are living in God's story, a story with a beginning, a middle, and an end, a good creation, a world gone wrong, and God's redemptive action to judge the world and yet at the same time save it and transfigure it into something glorious and imperishable.

But without a grand narrative like the Christian narrative, if we don't have a good beginning, and if we're confused or divided about how to understand the messy middle that we all find ourselves in, and if we don't know the end or if there even is an end, and whether or not it bends toward justice like Dr. King used to preach from his own Christian convictions, then it's gonna be hard to live this life with hope for the future, peace in the present, and convictions about the way things were always meant to be from the beginning.

So what I hope to show you from this passage is more than just the details about the end of the ages that the Bible interpreters disagree with each other about. What I hope to show you and what is clear from this passage is that it's only when we entrust ourselves to the end of God's story that we'll ever live with confident hope, comforting peace, and convicted purpose.

It's only when we entrust ourselves to the end of God's story that we'll ever live with confident hope, comforting peace, and convicted purpose. I think that's what Jesus most importantly was trying to get across to his disciples who were asking him about the destruction of the temple and the end of the world, and I think that's what he wants for us this morning too.

Now notice how I phrased this kind of main point that I just spoke. I didn't say when we know the details of the end of God's story. I said when we entrust ourselves to the end of God's story.

[25 : 15] And that's absolutely key to understanding this most important thrust in Mark chapter 13. Rather than focusing on all the details and the events that Jesus speaks about and rather than trying to predict the future and the exact time when the end will come, which Jesus says in verse 32, even he doesn't know, a better way to read and understand Mark chapter 13 is by focusing on Jesus' clear and direct commands and promises, I think.

To focus on the when, I think, is not the point or not the main point. And in fact, it shows that we are totally missing the heart and the mind and the person of Jesus.

I want you to notice something here. So this isn't the first time, right, that Jesus has prophesied about the future to his disciples. He's prophesied many times. We've seen him many times constantly foretelling them of his suffering, right, and of his death.

And yet this is the first time when they're actually curious enough to ask him when. When this prophecy would be fulfilled, when it would happen.

Not when it's about his destruction, but when it's about their beloved temple's destruction. And this should show us not only how much Jesus' disciples were totally missing the point and how far their hearts were from him, but it's a mirror for us, too, to consider the ways that we might be missing the point and ultimately missing Jesus.

[26 : 44] This is an opportunity to consider the areas where our hearts might be less concerned about Jesus and more concerned about things like the temple that won't last.

What are the things that we think are more important than they actually are to Jesus? Notice also how the disciples ask, they ask when, but they don't ask why, or how do you want us to live and

respond?

They were more concerned with the bare facts and the circumstances around them than God's purposes around them. More concerned with factual knowing than with faithful living.

And the application question for us is, do we also care more about our circumstances than God's purpose for our lives? Are we more concerned with predicting the future and setting ourselves up for favorable circumstances than we are with a personal relationship with God and living into his purposes?

The disciples totally missed the point. And we will too if we only see Jesus' response as an answer to their when will this happen question.

[28 : 01] Jesus isn't interested in just simply answering their question and puffing them up with knowledge about the details of their future circumstances. No, he is far more interested as we will see in how they will live faithfully into and toward the future as his disciples even without knowing the exact timing of the end.

I love how this commentator, he was formerly the president at Baylor, David Garland, he puts it this way in his commentary on this passage. He says, Mark's message is more subtle than to give us events to enter onto our end of time charts.

The message is simply this. God's way, God's Christ, and God's people will be vindicated in a conclusive manner that all will recognize.

That time is not yet. The disciple is not called to eliminate his ignorance of the timing of the end. He is called to cope with it and respond to it appropriately.

The question the text addresses is how does one live in difficult times? The end times drama will run its course scene by scene, but the actors on the stage have only vague clues about where they are precisely in the play.

[29 : 23] Only the stage director knows. He has given the actors instructions about what to do and what to say when they see certain things happen, but that is it. They know how the play ends, but they do not know when the curtain will fall.

And I would add, they don't need to know. They don't need to know when the curtain will fall. They need to know the father, the play director. Now, I don't have that much time left, but I do want to draw your attention to what I believe were the most important things Jesus wanted to get across to his disciples, far more important than accurately timing and predicting the future.

I want to draw your attention to three commands and a promise. Three commands and a promise. So first, notice the first thing Jesus says in verse five. He actually doesn't direct, he doesn't directly answer their question, their when will this happen question, but he gives them a command instead. They ask him, when's this going to happen? And what does he say? He says, watch out that no one deceives you. Many will come in my name claiming I am he and will deceive many.

Jesus' first response is not to answer their question and tell them when these things will happen, like when the temple will be destroyed and when he will return at the end of the age, but his main concern is that they watch out, hold steadfast to him and not be deceived by fake Messiah figures who will claim to solve all the world's problems if people would just trust and hope in them.

[30 : 47] And this isn't just because he wants them to just know the right things, know the right facts from the wrong ones, but it's because he wants them to know him. He wants them to trust him.

The more important thing to Jesus is his relationship with his disciples. That they don't fall away after false messiahs who do not love them and cannot save them, no matter how powerful, no matter how charming, beautiful, impressive, and promising, they seem to be just like Herod's shiny temple was.

They too will fall. They too will crumble. So that's the first command. Watch out and do not be deceived. It's a command to hold fast to Jesus and not go after false messiahs.

It's relevant to them. It's relevant to us. Another command Jesus gives is a word of preparation and peace in verse 7. Do not be alarmed. Notice even when Jesus begins to approach this topic of when in verse 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. Notice he's not saying certain wars. Look out for this special war in Iran, in Iraq, in Palestine. That's going to be the one that's going to finally signal the end to come.

[31 : 57] He's just saying that wars will definitely come. There will be wars on the way toward the end and they shouldn't alarm us or turn us into alarmist future predictors. They simply will happen, but he says, they're not the end.

The end, he says, is still to come. It's still to come, verse 7. Verse 8, nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places and famines, but Jesus says, these are just the beginning of birth pains.

Meaning, meaning that yes, these indicate that we are in the last days, but these are just the beginning of the last days and signs at the end will eventually come, even though we don't know the exact time.

We can't know. Just as a mother having her initial contractions knows the baby is coming and even soon, but does not know the exact time and hour that the baby will come, whether in half an hour, or in 24 hours, he's telling them what to expect and reminding them that none of these hard things is the end of the world.

Do not be alarmed, but in fact, these things, these hard things are the very way of Jesus himself. More than predicting, more important than predicting the future, what he's doing is he's preparing them for a life of faithfully following in his footsteps.

[33 : 17] Notice all these details. Verse 6, deceivers, false teachers, verse 7, wars, rumors of wars, verse 8, national and kingdom hostilities, earthquakes, famines, verse 9, disciples handed over to local councils, flogged in synagogues, standing before governors and kings, verse 11, arrested and put on trial, verse 12, families divided, verse 13, hatred from the world.

These are all things that in many ways could very much describe Jesus' human experience, can't they? So when he says, do not be alarmed, he's telling them that yes, hard times will come, but you don't need to be alarmed.

No, you're simply following in the way of your Lord, a road that involves suffering, but that ends in glories. He's telling them that their stories are being written exactly how Jesus' story was written, and that that's an honor and a privilege, and that is exactly how God intended to write their stories with a guarantee of a better ending to come.

Do not be alarmed, he commands them. The last command I want to draw your attention to is toward the end of the passage in verse 32. It's in verses 32 to 37. It's a couple commands, but I want to clump them together.

Be on guard, he says. Be alert, he says. Stay awake, keep watch, Jesus says. And he gives this illustration of servants not knowing when their master will come home. Now I know that this can sound pretty scary, like a terrible way to end this teaching, right?

[34 : 46] And when we read this, you know, I think a lot of us can think, like, wait, do I have to be perfect all the time with every second of my existence? Am I supposed to live with a kind of anxiety like Jesus could return at any second and be like, boo, I caught you.

I caught you not being faithful. Is this saying that I better stay awake and be on edge all the time? Even be afraid of Jesus' return?

You know, for most of my life, that's how I read this passage. And I said, how is this good news? When I gave some deeper thought to this illustration that Jesus gives, I began to wonder if it was actually less about being on edge and fearful of the master who could arrive at any moment and more about understanding, appreciating, believing in, and taking pride in the good job and role that I've been graciously assigned by my all-wise, all-loving master, a master who I definitely want to be serving in the first place.

Like, think of it that way. Jesus is not saying, be on edge because you never know when I might peekaboo. No. He's saying, be vigilant.

Stay on task. Do not grow weary in doing good. Do not grow weary or lazy or do not get distracted from the good mission and purpose that God has called you to, even if you don't know how long you'll be on this mission.

[36 : 24] Even if you don't know when the curtain's gonna fall, play your role, play your part and enjoy it. Jesus is calling us to keep living in light of the end, to stay awake, to have our eyes open and attentive to his story and how it ends.

Even when we don't know the time, the end will come. Those are the three commands. Now let's end with this last, with the promise, right?

Because I'm probably over time but know this, Jesus doesn't just give us commands, he gives us promises. He gives us promises to sustain and inspire our obedience to his commands and if I had time, I'd give you like three more, like verse 13, the promise that those who stand firm will be saved no matter what they go through, salvation's coming for those who stand firm in Christ or verse 26, the promise that regardless of how we interpret the events discussed here, the Son of Man will

come in glory and power.

That's something everyone agrees upon. There's a glorious end to the story and Jesus wins or this other promise in verse 31, heaven and earth will pass away but Jesus' words will never pass away that all that Jesus has ever said is true or will come true and we can bet our lives on it with even more confidence than we have that the sun will rise tomorrow or that the earth will continue to spin in orbit.

I'd love to say more about all these promises but I want to pick one in particular, the promise in verse 10, the promise that the gospel must first be preached to all nations and I want to get your attention on this promise because I think it illustrates the point that I'm making all along in this chapter of Mark that we miss out on so much if we read Mark 13 as just a puzzle to try to figure out the details and the timing of the last days.

[38 : 12] You know, for so many years reading the Bible, I always just read verse 10 as a mere sign, as a mere marker of when the world would end, of when the end would come and I've seen so many like missionaries and mission agencies base their whole strategy off of this, right?

Try to reach this nation and that nation so Jesus can finally come back, right? But revisiting this text this week opened my eyes to the better emphasis that I think that Jesus had on his heart.

See, verse 10 isn't simply a marker in time for us to look at our maps and say, okay, how many more people groups does the gospel need to go to and how long will that take so we can predict the day when Jesus will come back?

No. Verse 10 is Jesus' promise that no matter what tribulation may come that his disciples will always have good news to hope in and to share with the world because his good news will never fail to be good news worth believing in and living by and sharing.

And so verse 10 is Jesus' insistence to his disciples in these last days that the most important thing is the preaching of the gospel, the preaching of the good news about Jesus. It's a promise that his disciples filled and empowered by the Holy Spirit will not fail this task but will be incredibly successful even in spite of tribulation.

[39 : 28] He was saying just as certainly as the world will seem like it's falling apart and just as surely as you will be arrested and flogged and hated just like me, just as surely Jesus says will the good news still find its way to the world from Jerusalem to Samaria to the ends of the earth all throughout the Roman Empire and beyond.

And just like the suffering of the cross could not hold me down in the grave nothing, nothing is going to be able to sour or stop the good news about me and my kingdom.

And that is his promise to the church. This was to be the disciples' heartbeat after Jesus' resurrection and ascension into heaven and this is to be our heartbeat as well, Christ's church as we await Jesus' return in the last days of history.

No matter how many millennia these last days will last, no matter what kinds of difficulties we face, no matter who wins the 2024 elections, it's not the end of the world until Jesus says so and we will always have good news because while kingdoms may rise and fall and even the greatest temples in the world and even while the Messiah himself might be slain, he is risen and he is returning and this is good news for us, it's good news for the nations, the good news that the greater temple who was torn down yet raised in three days to pay for our sins and bring resurrection life into this world, this is the gospel, the gospel of Jesus and this gospel of Jesus is the only possible source of confident hope, comforting peace and convicted purpose.

So Christchurch, is that what we're going to be about? Proclaiming the gospel to all the nations, is it a must to us as it was for Jesus and for his disciples?

[41 : 27] The gospel must first be preached to all the nations because if it's true, how could it not be? How could it not be a must to us? Christ has died, Christ has risen and Christ will come again.

Let's pray. Lord, I thank you for my brothers and sisters in this room who endured a longer sermon than normal but I pray that they will come away with that confident hope, that comforting peace and that convicted purpose that you desire for all those who would entrust themselves to your story as the perfect story writer who's shown us the way in Jesus.

In his name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen.