

# Let the Reader Understand?

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     how easily there are things in this world that will lead us astray. And so he wants his disciples to stay awake. So let's get into the context for a moment.

In chapter 13, this is sort of a hinge in Mark's gospel. For the past two chapters, we've been dealing with these temple issues. Jesus, he has all these frustrations with the temple, with its system, with its leadership.

But then chapter 13 also swings us forward into the passion narrative. From this point onward, the pace towards the cross is quicker and quicker. And so we begin in verses 1 through 4, and we see, you know, the disciples are with Jesus, and they're oohing and aahing over the temple.

And by any measure, the temple was actually very impressive. It was decadent. But Jesus is unimpressed. Mark tells us he leaves the temple. He sits opposite of it.

And this isn't just acute attention to detail on Mark's part. This is symbolic action. Christ is sitting across from the temple because he has said, essentially, this whole system is corrupt.

[ 1 : 0 4 ]     This system that was supposed to help people enter into the presence of God has actually stood in the way of people entering into the presence of God. And it has to end. There has to be room made for something new to come.

But the disciples, they sit there, and they keep gazing at shiny objects, and they miss the point once again. And so Jesus brings them up to speed. He says, these great buildings, these great buildings, there won't be one stone left here unturned or thrown down.

Can you imagine? You're looking at this fantastic building, and your teacher says, this is going to be destroyed. And so Peter, James, John, and Andrew pull Jesus aside, and they say, tell us, which in the Greek is actually a command.

Tell us when these things will be, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished. It's a problematic request, because they're commanding Jesus to do something, which is problematic in and of itself.

But they're asking ultimately for a sign. And in the Gospels, asking for a sign is never a good thing. In chapter 8, the Pharisees demand a sign from Jesus to test him, and Jesus isn't all that keen about it.

[ 2 : 2 4 ]     In the other Gospels, Jesus actually condemns asking for a sign. So when the disciples ask for a sign, they're already on slippery ground. And then you also need to note, they say these things not once, but twice.

Tell us when these things will take place. These things being the destruction of the temple. That's fundamentally what they mean. So from here on out, in this passage, anytime we see the word these things, it's in reference to the temple's destruction.

But what you'll see is that Jesus uses these things, the temple's destruction, to talk about those days, the final consummation of when Christ will come back and make all things new.

And so in the passage, Christ actually goes back and forth between these things and those days. And that's really helpful to know, because otherwise this passage can seem really confusing. So let's get into his response to the disciples.

In verse 5, he says, Why is this his first response?

[ 3 : 35 ] Signs, they lead us somewhere. When you see a stop sign, for example, you know it's probably in your best interest to stop, unless you're in California. When you look at a map, you're trying to discern signs and markers so that you can find your way to a destination.

And so the sorts of signs that we use to navigate through this world, to make meaning of this world, are immensely important. They lead us somewhere. And so there's something about the type of sign that the disciples are asking for that's problematic, that can lead them astray.

And Jesus, he spells this out in verses 5 through 13, this first kind of segment of text. Jesus says, There's going to be false teachers who come in my name.

Nations and kingdoms will be at war. The world will shake with earthquakes. Humanity will be distraught with famines.

Those who follow him will be persecuted, and families will be divided. And with all that weightiness, Jesus essentially says, But don't be alarmed.

[ 4 : 47 ] The world is just going to keep working the way the world has worked. So how then does the dysfunction of the world carry the risk of us being led astray?

And I think Jesus says, It can lead us astray in two ways. We can look at the world's problem, and all of these things going on, and we can be led astray by religious fortune telling. Or we can look at the world's problems, and we can be led astray by false teaching.

Let's start with religious fortune telling. There are people and groups out there who take passages like Mark 13, or the book of Revelation, Daniel, and they say, Here is just this detailed blueprint of how the world is going to end.

And so they get so caught up trying to decipher, When will the end of times be? When is this going to take place? And they get so caught up in trying to figure out the future that they actually lose track of faithfulness here and now.

Every news story starts becoming this hint that the world might be ending. They take something like what happened in Boston last week, and they say, Look, the world is beginning to end.

[ 5 : 56 ] And so this becomes the sole purpose of their life. And unfortunately, it's like these book series come out on this topic, and people end up knowing these books better than the Bible itself.

Something about being left behind. And you know, I'm actually, I have to admit, I'm personally familiar with this. When I first became a Christian, I became obsessed with this end times blog.

A lady named Sherry Schreiner, you can Google it, and then make fun of me. She proposed that when the end times start, this is how the world will be deceived into believing the Antichrist.

Demons will disguise themselves as aliens and come to the world and say that they created the human race, and that will unite us all to worship the false Christ.

No, I'm kidding. Like this, I'm not joking. This was on the internet. I read this stuff. I got really into this stuff. Some of you are like, Oh yeah, that seems like a good theory. That's why you're all quiet, I'm assuming. It was entertaining, but I mean, it was wrong.

[ 6 : 58 ]     Totally wrong. And it did nothing to help me actually follow Jesus in the moment. All I cared about was like, when is the end going to be? I lost sight of the present. And I think this is Christ's concern for his disciples.

Will they get so caught up trying to figure out the signs that they miss being faithful in the present? Will we? Will we get so distracted by trying to figure out what all the brokenness and the suffering in the world means that we never figure out what it means to be faithful in the midst of it?

That's the first risk. How about the risk of false teaching? Jesus says in verse 6, Many will come in my name saying, I am he and they will lead many astray. In other words, counterfeit Christs and functional saviors will try to take the rightful throne of Christ in your heart.

In light of how the world works, we see all this brokenness. We see all this pain. We don't know how to make sense of it. And sometimes the answers of Christ just don't seem to satisfy. And so what we end up doing is looking to alternative visions of human flourishing.

We turn to opinions of culture. We turn to different teachings. I want to look at one response to the tragedy in Boston last week. Actor Peyton Oswald, he made this post on Facebook and it went viral and all the news outlets ended up picking it up and people were rallying behind what he said.

[ 8 : 29 ]     So listen to what he said. This is a giant planet and we're lucky to live on it. But there are prices and penalties incurred for the daily miracle of existence.

One of them is every once in a while the wiring of a tiny sliver of the species gets snarled and they're pointed towards darkness. But the vast majority stands against that darkness and like white blood cells attacking a virus they dilute and weaken and eventually wash away the evil doers.

This is beyond religion or creed or nation. We would not be here if humanity were inherently evil. We'd have eaten ourselves alive long ago. So when you spot violence or bigotry or intolerance or fear or just garden variety misogyny, hatred or ignorance just look it in the eye and think the good outnumber you and we always will.

There's some truth in this. Not much but some. You know good will ultimately overcome evil. but just not in this secular humanist way that Oswald imagines.

What he's essentially saying is that humanity is not all that bad. We're actually quite good. Well at least the majority of us are. And the majority will always prevail.

[ 9 : 50 ]     It's really pleasing to the ear. But it's not honest. I don't even know where to start with how many issues there are. I mean competing visions of good. Who's good will survive?

Which version of good is the better good? I mean there's all these problems and yet it gets like a bajillion likes on Facebook. Why? Well if human thriving is simply just being a relatively good people that outnumbers the bad then it doesn't actually require anything of us at all.

It hardly confronts the darkness that lies within ourselves. It actually offers no consolation to those who are suffering in the present. But the problem is false teachings like this this humanist attitude pervades Christians as much as it does our non-Christian counterparts.

And it's fundamentally anti-biblical. Because good does not overcome evil by us simply being a good people. The only way evil is overcome is by the goodness of God and by what he has definitively done on the cross through his only son.

And the gospel the gospel is the only hope that we have for a world gone wrong. Because when tragedy strikes our systems of justice and retribution can never undo what has been done.

[ 11 : 16 ]     No matter if we can bring full justice to the perpetrators of this Boston tragedy there will never be true justice. We can never bring back limbs.

we can never bring back the dead. It can never be undone. Only if there's a God only if Christ really is who he said he is that we can hope that one day there really will be justice.

One day limbs really will be given back. One day the dead will be reunited and raised. Only by the power of Jesus can evil be undone.

Without that power evil always has the final say. And so in verses 5 through 13 we see Christ warning his disciples in these two ways.

He warns them not to get so caught up with discerning the signs that it keeps them from doing his work here and now. But then he also warns them not to turn to false teachings that attempt to resolve the challenges of living here and now.

[ 12 : 21 ] Because he knows that signs lead us and he doesn't want us to be led astray by signs that read apocalypse now or humanism will save you because Christ is the only sign.

Christ is the only way we can learn to navigate the challenges of being in this broken world. And that's why he says in verse 10 the gospel must be proclaimed to all nations.

This is the chief purpose and vocation of the Christian. This is our sole focus that we would become people so enamored by the hope and the good news of Christ's death and resurrection that we can't help but live it out not just with our lives but also with our lips that the gospel must continue to go forward in and through us.

This is supposed to be our focus. This is our center. This is how we know whether we're being led astray by false teachings or whether we're beginning to emphasize the end too much. The gospel is the sign for navigating the present.

Yet all of these things the struggles of the world Christ says are only the beginnings of the birth pains. In verses 14 through 27 Jesus transitions and begins to talk about those days the actual end when he will return and make all things new.

[ 13 : 42 ] And in this part he exhorts the disciples be on guard. I think he's not concerned about be on guard about the facts he's concerned about their hearts keep your hearts on guard.

Because it's this part of chapter 13 especially verse 14 that can be problematic. This is the Tupperware lid of the chapter. And there's all these theories right about what is the abomination of desolation.

When I was in seminary I did two things on the abomination of desolation. I wrote a 15 page paper and then I also wrote a song with three words the abomination of desolation.

And when Julia found out that I was preaching this she remembered nothing in the paper but remembered the song and started singing my little ditty you know the abomination of desolation abomination like just that.

I just sang it over and over while I was writing it. And great song great song. But when I re-read my paper terrible like terrible like I don't agree with anything I wrote and yet I got an A on this paper which makes me wonder what was wrong with my New Testament professor.

[ 14 : 50 ] This part Mark says let the reader understand and we're like what? What are you talking about? I don't understand. But it shows that at least there were some in the early Christian community that knew they were tracking with what Mark said abomination of desolation yeah I know okay cool let's keep going.

Think about like if we hear the word the phrase like war on terror we know this is about fighting terrorism but 300 years from now 3,000 years from now what will people think when they hear the war on terror?

Will they think that we were trying to fight against someone ever feeling afraid again? There's these challenges in interpreting scripture and in a passage like this so I don't necessarily have time to get into the abomination of desolation but if you have any questions you can email me my address is Aaron at sjvan dot org happy to answer any questions you have anything about the abomination of desolation so let's continue in verses 14 through 27 there is something we can know without a shadow of a doubt there is something that is so clear that this should capture our attention that when Christ returns no matter no matter what precedes it you can't miss it it will be obvious you will know it's happening because it will be no small thing the entire universe will shake stars will be falling the universe will be going through a complete recreation you will not miss it it will be cosmic in scope

Christ will be coming in glory and power you can't miss his return so don't worry about it it's like a kid who grows up in the prairies thanks Lawrence and has never seen the ocean and so the family is going on this road trip to Vancouver to see the ocean and the whole time she's just stressed about it she doesn't want to miss the ocean seeing it for the first time you know like like most girls she's like twirling her hair and going bald because she's just like so stressed out about it and she keeps telling her parents don't let me miss the ocean don't let me miss the ocean she just doesn't understand the magnitude of the ocean and so her parents keep saying don't worry like you you can't miss it even if you take a nap you'll wake up and it'll be there you can't just close your eyes and blink it's gone we may not understand how we're going to get from point a to point b we may not completely understand what events are going to transpire before Christ returns but when he does return it will be obvious you don't have to worry because it also tells us when he returns he's coming for us he's coming for those who know him those who trust in him which means you won't be left behind you won't miss it

God won't overlook you or somehow forget you he's coming back for you and so after Jesus talks about those days he returns then to talking about these things in verses 28 through 31 and he tells the disciples clearly you will see the destruction of the temple in your lifetime and he says these things the destruction of the temple will happen in your generation and indeed they did the temple was destroyed in 70 AD but we got to know Jesus says these things will happen in your generation not those days and people make this passage problematic when it doesn't need to be he's not saying the end of time was supposed to happen in the disciples lifetime but then Jesus says something so phenomenal so revolutionary that I think we should cling to this with all that we have he says heaven and earth will pass away but my words will not pass away heaven and earth will pass away but my words will not pass away it's not the signs of the end that we trust in it's not these false visions of humanity that we trust in we trust in Christ's words which endure beyond time and space this is such a huge relief it tells us that

[ 19 : 12 ] Christianity is not fundamentally about our knowledge and how much we understand it actually tells us that even in our confusion all we have to do is put our trust in Christ knowing that he understands these words he will bring it to pass we trust his word we trust his promises we trust that he will indeed return and make all things new so after that he transitions again and starts talking about those days in verse 32 he says but concerning that day or that hour no one knows not even angels in heaven nor the son nor but only the father only god the father knows when christ will return which means the moment you meet someone or read a book that starts predicting times and places and dates of when the return will start they are automatically wrong don't even listen to it it will lead you astray these are false teachings the moment people start thinking they know when christ will return they are claiming to have the knowledge of god that no one has nobody knows and so what jesus does is he brings his main thrust and point back home one more time he says in verse 33 be on guard stay awake stay awake awake and of course we know we're not awake and of course we know we're prone to be sleepy and he's not concerned with our literal sleepiness the point is that our pursuit of christ can become half-hearted our hearts can be divided i want to spell out what i think a sleepy faith looks like prayer seems unimportant or a burden or chore your career becomes more important than community than than being in christian relationships and creating space throughout the week to actually connect with people your wants trump god's plan or will jesus is the add-on rather than the center of your life and so you're so caught up in the busyness of day-to-day that he just gets relegated to the margins and spare time of your life you believe more in the teachings of popular culture than you do in the teachings of christ and so it becomes all about your own goals your own direction you choose the signs and so really what you do is you have one foot in the world and one foot fallen in christ and he was totally divided and jesus he knows this i think that's why he says stay awake he knows that we're prone to being led astray he knows that we can drift off in directions that take us away from him he knows that our affections of the heart can be divided and so he calls us to stay awake and i think this is what staying awake looks like you're aware of christ's continual eternal abiding presence with you one thing i love is he says when you're going to be persecuted in the synagogues and you will be don't worry about what you're going to say because the holy spirit will give you the words don't worry because christ is with you when you're awake you're aware of the tender presence of christ you you anticipate his action in your life and you actively guard your heart against temptation busyness distraction your proclivity to move away from him you guard against that and you pray not as a duty but as a conversation with your loving father and you're

purposefully engaged in the world you see that if the gospel is true your whole life has to be given to that truth and so you're open to god's direction you're willing to take risks you're willing to continue following him even in the midst of suffering and brokenness and unresolved things because you ultimately trust in christ's words and you're willing to do what he says even if it doesn't make sense because following him is worth it jesus is the sign you look to and how you navigate life sleepy and awake i think if any of us are honest we look at that and we say how how do i move from sleepy to awake how do i get there and paul writes in ephesians 5 14 awake oh sleeper and christ will shine on you love this verse awake oh sleeper and christ will shine on you waking up simply involves opening your eyes and fixing them on jesus and seeing how beautiful he is how compassionate and merciful his gaze is towards you how his wounds offer you forgiveness and redemption and wholeness how his presence continues to work in you giving you both the desire and the will to do his good purpose and pleasure when you see and open your eyes and wake up and see how christ is for you and how he is more faithful to you than you will ever be to him it wakes you up and it says that his light shines on you and it begins to eradicate the darkness in you because his goodness ultimately overcomes the evil within us his goodness ultimately overcomes the evil in the world his goodness puts lives back together puts the universe back together and makes the center of creation love once again this is a charismatic church i would have got at least a hallelujah yes he calls us to stay awake not so that we know when the end will be he calls us to stay awake so that when he returns or when we finally meet him face to face we will be the type of people he called us to be and staying awake ultimately means claiming our chief purpose as christians proclaiming the gospel to all nations so i want to say one last thing this whole passage this whole passage is a reminder there is stuff in scripture we're just never going to understand we're never going to have all the answers and that's just true of life there are things we are never going to understand on this side of eternity we're not going to understand all the pain and the suffering and the wars we may see christ return in our life we may not but there are a few things we do know he calls us to stay awake in the anticipation of his return but not to the neglect of our faithfulness of doing his work here and now he gives us these commands don't be led astray be on guard stay awake proclaim the gospel don't be anxious because god is with you and christ's word endures forever amen moment you and y you you you you