

Mark 13 (PM)

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Date: 05 March 2023

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[0 : 0 0] So we're looking at Mark 13. So you've heard it read, goodness me, it's a tricky one, isn't it? It's tricky. So let me make a few introductory remarks. Three. Three introductory remarks.

When it comes to this chapter, there has been a regrettable history of interpretation.

Some people have said some crazy stuff about it and have tried to make the scriptures say more than I think God intended them to say.

And that is regrettable. So here's my strategy. There is stuff in the chapter I don't fully understand. And the scholarship's a bit divided on a few things.

But, this is a big but, the big ideas are very clear. And so that's the lane I'm going to stay in. I'm going to stay in the lane of big ideas. The big ideas lane.

[1 : 1 0] Second, introductory comment. It would be a mistake to read this and say, wow, you know, this is just kind of freaky, eschatological, super-heady, theoretical, dense theological stuff.

It would be a mistake to think that because it's actually very practical. Jesus' intention is very practical and very pastoral. He just says simply, mostly, be on guard.

And stay awake. When it comes to living the Christian life, don't fall asleep on the job. That's the big pastoral message. And why do I, why does he say this? Because, well, one reason.

In the very next chapter, Jesus' sin gets enemy. And the disciples literally fall asleep when he needed them to be really alert.

So, it's a thing that can happen. It's a thing that can happen to Christians. We can, you know, we can get sleepy. We can lose spiritual focus. Specifically, in Mark 13, Jesus mentions a number of ways this happens.

[2 : 1 9] He says Christ followers can get distracted. We can get deceived. And we can get discouraged. Distracted, deceived, and discouraged.

Which is why, in this chapter, he keeps saying, be on guard. Deception, distraction, discouragement. These are real possibilities. And I have seen, I know Christians who have gotten really lost for all of these reasons.

There's a lovely summary in verse 36. Just two words to summarize this big message. Stay awake. Stay awake.

Be alert to these dangers. Okay, third. Third introductory comment. One of the tricky things about Mark 13 is that Jesus is sometimes talking about the destruction of the temple.

And he's sometimes talking about the end of days, end of time stuff. So there is this, like, double horizon in this passage.

[3 : 2 7] So it's like, you know, like the North Shore mountains. There's a range of mountains. And then there's another range behind that. Sometimes Jesus is talking about the first range. And sometimes he's talking about the range behind that.

And it's difficult to know which range he's talking about sometimes. Because he moves pretty fluidly between the two. But what he says to us applies to both.

So hold all that stuff. Kind of mush that into your brain. Just sort of hold it there. And then we'll get on with the actual text. So let's jump in.

And we're just going to, we're going to start right at the start here. And then I'm going to bounce around a little bit. So our story begins with Jesus. He's leaving the temple. And he's walking away. And walking away from the temple.

Which is quite a sort of a symbolic thing. And the disciples point out the temple to Jesus and go, Goodness me, look how fantastic that building is. Isn't that?

[4 : 25] Isn't that awesome? And it was architecturally very impressive. It was one of the sort of the great wonders of the Roman world.

From a distance, apparently, it looked like a mountain of gold. It would have just dominated the city. So they point that out to Jesus. And they are oohing and ahing.

And Jesus' response to that is quite unexpected. He says, do you see these buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another.

That will not be thrown down. This is very serious stuff he's saying. I mean, these words, those words there were used later to convict him. And they were used to mock him when he was on the cross.

But it was a prediction of the destruction of the temple. And as a lot of you will know, it happened. In 70 AD, the Romans, in retaliation for a Jewish revolt, destroyed the temple.

[5 : 25] Now remember I said that this passage is very pastoral and very practical. Here's a great, just a pause for a moment, a great example. Verse 14.

So what's that all about?

Okay, so in Daniel, which is a book of the Old Testament, there's this prediction about the temple being ransacked and defiled. And Daniel uses this phrase, abomination of desolation, to describe how awful it's going to be.

And Daniel's prediction came to pass. In 168 BC, the Greeks ransacked Jerusalem. They put a statue of Zeus in the temple and they sacrificed sort of pigs on the altar.

It was an abomination of desolation. So Jesus takes the same sentence, knowing that his heroes will know it, like sort of like a code word. And he predicts a new invasion.

[6 : 48] And his prediction came true, 70 AD. This time it was the Romans. So in verse 14, Jesus, after predicting the invasion, says to the church, when this happens, this is going to happen.

When you see it happening, when you see the Romans coming over the hill, just run. Like run away. It's not that tricky.

Like I know the whole passage sounded really tricky. It's not that tricky. He's saying this is going to happen. They're going to destroy the temple. When you see it happening, run away. Temple Schmemple. Just get out of there. Schmemple.

S-H-M-E-M-P-L-E. For those of you taking notes at home. I noticed you didn't write anything down when I said that, Sam.

There's this guy called Asubius, who was one of the first great sort of historians of the church. And in his writings about this invasion, he said, Christians, knowing the words of Jesus, rightfully feeling no compulsion to defend the temple, did get out of Dodge.

[7 : 59] And they ran away and they were saved. So it's Jesus. He's just being very, he's very practically telling the church how to survive in the sort of a church's infancy. But he doesn't want us to just be physically okay.

More importantly, he wants us to be spiritually in really good shape. And that's the main focus of the passage. And that can be hard. Because we can get sleepy.

We can get those three words again. We can get distracted. We can get discouraged. And we can be deceived. So what I want to do now is just look at those three things. Starting with distraction.

Jesus tells him that the time of the temple is over. Sacrificial system. We'll finish with it. Because Christ will be the once for all sacrifice.

And this is huge. I mean, this is a bombshell. And what are the disciples interested in? What do they want to know? They don't want to dive into the theology of that and the temple.

[9 : 04] They just want to know what are the signs. So what are the signs? What's going to happen so we can know when this is going to happen? What are the things that are going to pop up in the world? Which is just the wrong question.

So what does Jesus tell them? I mean, it's really tricky. It's wonderful. In verses 6 to 9, he doesn't give them the signs. He gives them the anti-signs. He says there's going to be wars. There's going to be famines.

There's going to be earthquakes. Those are not the signs. In North America, there's this whole Christian subculture around predicting the end of time.

It's kind of like Christian fortune telling. Every news story is kind of a hint. People get really caught up in reading the signs.

Signs that Jesus says are not signs. I made the mistake this week of Googling Ukraine and end times. And I was going to quote some lines to you, but I felt really bad about doing that.

[10 : 06] Because I think the people who write these blogs mostly are just really wonderful Christians. Lovely people who have become distracted. Whose eyes are on the wrong things.

And Jesus is very clear here in verse 32. Concerning that day or that hour, no one knows. Not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father in heaven.

I mean, it's clear. If Jesus doesn't know, we're not going to work it out by reading the newspaper. But it doesn't even just say that. He gives us a little parable in verse 34.

About a man who goes away for a little while and he leaves his employees in charge of his house. And when he comes back, he says, I don't want to find you sleeping on the job. It's very reasonable. Jesus is telling us a couple of things here.

He says, you won't be able to work out when I'm going to come back. But that's no excuse for kind of slacking off, you know. You should always be in a state of readiness. So, always be on.

[11 : 09] Get on with the life of faith. That's very practically what he's saying. Pastorally, he adds in verses 24 to 27, these words.

But in those days, after the tribulation, the sun will be darkened, the moon will not give its light, the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

And then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory, and then he will send out his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

So, a pastor friend of mine called Glenn Ennis lives in Edinburgh, runs a Baptist church there. He took this photo from his backyard a week ago. This is in his backyard.

So, this is in Scotland, in Edinburgh. I'm going to WhatsApp with him. He said this is the first time in his life, in his mother's life, that they've ever seen the northern lights this far south.

[12 : 13] So, if you're in Edinburgh a week ago, and you look up in the night sky, you would not, you would not have missed this.

You would not miss this. And that's the point of verses 24 to 27. Jesus says, you're not going to be able to predict when I return, which is okay, because you're not going to miss it.

You won't miss this. This will be a cosmic event. Not only that, but when the end comes, Jesus says, if you follow him, you won't be forgotten about.

God will send his messengers and he will gather his people. This is a promise. There will be no empty seats in heaven, which is, I know it's a very cheesy line.

I like it though. Because I hope you hear that and it creates hope in you, or assurance in you. When Christ comes, you won't miss out.

[13 : 18] He will carry you into eternity, into unspeakable joy. Just to orient you again. Jesus has been talking about being distracted.

There's a number of ways that can happen in our life. The example he gives is being overly concerned about end times, which is a thing nowadays. That's the example Jesus gives.

He doesn't want us to be distracted. And he doesn't want us to be deceived. This is another thing we have to be on guard for. Verses 5 and 21 talk about this.

And Jesus began to say to them, See that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name saying, I am he. They will lead many astray. Verse 21. And then 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 rise. Be on guard. Guard. So Jesus assumes that there is a real possibility that we can be led astray.

[14 : 27] And through history, there have been many fake Christs through history. There always will be. In our context, in our context today in Canada, I think the ways we're led astray are a bit more subtle.

Let me give you, or the ways we're sort of deceived are a bit more subtle. Let me give you an example of a heresy. Which is an easy one to get on board with. So, there's a lot of confusion around identity in the world.

And a huge issue in the world right now. What are the roots of that? Well, they're manifold. But one of the big things driving it, some scholars say, is the ancient Greek idea of Gnosticism.

In the early church, they called this a heresy. Because it was sort of affecting theology. It was affecting the way people thought about Jesus' embodiment and all that sort of stuff.

And it's actually not going away, this idea of Gnosticism. N.T. Wright, who's an Anglican scholar, offers this as a definition of Gnosticism. In the Gnostic worldview, the material world is essentially even.

[15 : 39] As a result, all the so-called natural distinctions in the world are at best illusory, and at worst, corrupted deceptions. So, in this definition, things like gender, or the natural order for sexual relations, they're imagined ideas, they're not necessarily true, and they're not anything that needs to be held on to.

So, in the Gnostic worldview, the goal is, so, way back in the days, in Greek thought, the idea was you sort of escape your body.

When you die, you wanted to escape your body. And that bleeds into how we think about this stuff today, because it's like, the goal is to escape a natural order.

Because the natural order could be deceptive. So, in this sense, you define yourself, you create your own identity, you forge your own way, and it's a very attractive idea.

It's tremendously popular, and it can leak into our faith. But it is a heresy. It bumps up against some fundamental Christian ideas about what it means to be a human.

[16 : 45] Like the goodness, the goodness of our bodies. The sacred architecture of our bodies. The right that God has to tell us how to live as our creator.

These are not things we try and escape from. These are things that we hang on to, that we root our identity in. All that to say, it's really, really important that we learn to filter what we take in, to filter what we're learning from the podcasts we listen to, to filter what we're learning from the teachers and lecturers.

Lots of great stuff out there. Lots of wonderful things you'll listen to, you'll hear from people. But not all the ideas you hear are good and helpful.

So don't just accept every attractive idea thoughtlessly. When you hear an idea and it sounds appealing and it's sort of in lockstep with where culture is at right now, you may think, well, you know, it's not very Christian-y, but I like it.

Makes me sound progressive, makes me sound cool, makes me fit in well. I think I'm just going to take it on board. At that point, ask yourself the question, in your head or out loud, ask yourself the question, what are the presuppositions behind that idea?

[18 : 07] What are the assumptions? What are the convictions that are animating this idea? And then flex some theological muscle and ask yourself, is this idea, can it exist within a Christian framework?

And if not, no matter how attractive, no matter how widely held it is, in the words of Christ in our passage, do not believe it. Be on guard for it.

So, don't be distracted. Do not be deceived. And lastly, and quickly, do not be discouraged, fearful.

Look at verses 9, 12 there. 9, 12, and 13, actually. Be on your guard. They'll deliver you over to councils, you'll be beaten in synagogues, you'll stand before all these important people and bear witness before them.

Brother will be against brother, father against child, children against parents, you're going to be hated. But the one who endures in the end will be saved. The general idea here is, at times, you may face strong disapproval because of your faith.

[19 : 24] Be on guard, Jesus says, be on guard. There's a danger in here for us. Because when our faith bumps up against predominant cultural beliefs, it can be tempting to distance yourself from those beliefs for the sake of sort of social cohesion, the sake of keeping the peace.

Even if you've never had really serious persecution in your life, there's a danger here. You can imagine in yourself, you can imagine in your mind, yeah, but if I sort of say this or speak up about this, I could be mocked or socially sidelined.

And you can start to stay a bit quiet on Jesus. And folks, I'll say this really simply, if you stop loving Jesus publicly, you'll start to do it privately as well. Be on guard for that danger.

There's a great encouragement in verse 31 here. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. Isn't that just, isn't that wonderful?

Every ideology, every philosophy opposed to Jesus will pass away. Every persecution, every injustice will end.

[20 : 35] everything in my life that I vainly put my trust in will pass away.

But the words of Jesus are forever. Jesus is forever. Look, following Jesus is costly. He's not calling you to your best life now.

There's going to be a cost. I mean, there's going to be huge, great swaths of joy and ease, and I hope there's lots of that in your life. But there will be difficult periods in your life because of your faith.

Don't give up. Don't give up. Let me finish very, very quickly here. Folks, Jesus is our great treasure.

Don't be discouraged. Don't be distracted. Don't be deceived. Be on guard. Stay awake.

[21 : 35] Let me sing in a second here, but can I just pray for you really quick. Heavenly Father, we pray against the great temptations to distance ourselves from you when it's unpopular.

We pray against the temptation to be distracted by, you know, shiny ideas and thoughts, to be deceived by these things. Lord, we pray that you would be our great treasure and that there would be nothing else in our life that is as shiny and as good and as wonderful as you.

Help us to see your beauty, Father. And live into that. In Jesus' name, amen.