

Stay Awake and Proclaim the Gospel

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Date: 13 March 2016

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[0 : 0 0] Have your Bibles, please turn to Mark chapter 13. I always encourage you to have your Bibles when we do the Bible reading, but especially for this one, because it is one of those chapters where a lot is said by Jesus, and it does require you to follow it along, unless you've got superb memories, of course. So let's pick it up then in Mark chapter 13, beginning at verse 1, and we're going to read the entire chapter. It's only a short chapter. Now hear God's Word.

And as he came to the temple, one of his disciples said to him, Look, teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings. And Jesus said to him, Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down. And as he sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately, Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished? And Jesus began to say to them, See that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name, saying, I am he, and they will lead many astray.

And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. This must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places. There will be famines. These are but the beginning of the birth pains. But be on your guard, for they will deliver you over to the councils, and you will be beaten in synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake to bear witness before them. And the gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations. And then when they bring you to trial and deliver you over, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say, but say whatever is given to you in that hour.

For it is not you who will speak, but the Holy Spirit. And brother will deliver brother over to death, and father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death.

And you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. But when you see the abomination of desolation standing there, standing where it ought not to be, let the reader understand. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.

[2 : 4 7] Let the one who is on the housetop not go down nor enter his house to take anything out. And let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak. And alas for the women who are pregnant, and for those who are nursing infants in those days, pray that it may not happen in winter.

For in those days there will be such a tribulation as has not been from the beginning of creation that God created until now and never will be. And if the Lord had not cut short the days, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect whom he chose, he shortened the days.

And then if anyone says to you, look, here is the Christ, or look, there he is. Do not believe it. False Christ and false prophets will arise and perform signs and wonders to lead astray, if possible, the elect. But be on your guard. I have told you all these things beforehand.

But in those days after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in 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, and from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven. From the fig tree learn its lesson. As soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near. And at the very gates, truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard. Keep awake, for you do not know when the time will come.

[4 : 54] It is like a man going on a journey when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. Therefore stay awake, for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in evening or at midnight, or when the cock crows, or in the morning, lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you, I say to all, stay awake.

And it's at this point I feel like saying, if only Jesus came back and told us what he was talking about. But we will get to it after we sing this next hymn. Let's stand.

Have your Bibles, please open them again, to Mark 13. The best way to start this in many ways is to perhaps with an illustration, and the illustration would be, imagine for a moment you've heard something in a particular way for so long, and then someone comes along and says, well what about looking at it from this point of view? I'll give you an example of this. In our Bible study, we're doing, as you know, the series on applied, how to read and interpret and understand the Bible for yourself, and also how to explain it to somebody else. And we took the parable of the wheat and the tares.

Most people read the parable of the wheat and the tares and think that the reason you're not to pull up the tares is because you can't tell them apart from the wheat. When the parable clearly states that everyone in the parable knows that they are tares and not wheat. So the explanation cannot be one of clarity. In other words, you can't tell the difference. It must be one of entanglement.

You can't pull them up because it will damage the others. You know who they are, but you can't do anything about it. And that's the way I tend to look at Mark 13. For many years, you get taught a passage as you grow up in church, and you think, yeah, I understand that. And then you have a look at it yourself, and you think, well, what about that? And what about this? So Jesus is clearly saying a couple of things here, which are both important for the people that he's speaking to then, and really important for us who he's speaking to now. The issue is, is whether or not you're going to be interested enough to listen to what he has to say. Jesus doesn't say listen. He does put it in the words of stay awake, though. Can this sustain your interest enough that you stay awake? And by stay awake, Jesus is not referring to you not sleeping. By stay awake, Jesus means to be spiritually awake.

[7 : 35] You can be awake but still asleep, spiritually speaking, that your body's awake. You can listen to the words of Jesus, but they don't necessarily penetrate. In other words, you're, you're, it's as if you are asleep to the very words of Jesus. Well, Jesus here wants us to be not only listening to him, but he wants us to be awake at the reality that the future and everything promised in the future will happen, just like all the things that were promised in the future back in the day that is now our past happened. And the reason why this is important is because in the meantime, we have something to do. Several years ago, our firm divided up different men. Some went on to do the national housing exhibition in London, and some of us got to go and work on the Isles of Scilly.

I got to go and work on the Isles of Scilly, not because I didn't want to do the national housing exhibition, but because both me and my workmate crashed our van and we, you know, stick us on an island for sort of six months, and that's how the bosses treated us. But so we're on this island while the other team is doing the national housing exhibition. I won't say who he is, but I can picture him now as I speak about him. One of the laborers that went up to help the roofers finish off these roofs was not seen a lot. Every now and then he'd turn up and he'd walk by and he'd carry a few tiles and it looked as if he was doing something. I guess you have the equivalent if you work in an office, someone walks by with some paper and you naturally assume that they must be doing something right.

Well, yes, they're just walking with paper in their hand. Okay, it's unsafe to assume anything other than that. Just say what you see. And he was never really seen. No one ever really knew what he got up to. And when they finished it, they came out and said, well, where were you all the time?

And we spent a couple of days later in the national newspapers, they put out a series of pictures of the national housing exhibition. And it was all the stages from it being an empty room to the room gradually getting filled and filled to you have the final product. In one of those pictures, there was this laborer caught sleeping behind a pallet of tiles.

And for the whole time he was there, he managed to at least convince all the other workers that he was indeed doing something. But later in the national newspapers of all places, there he is, that very laborer caught sleeping behind a pallet of tiles. The point is this, that here and now you can get away with it. You can paper shuffle your way through serving Jesus. But in the final analysis, in the final day, there's going to be clear-cut evidence as to actually what you have been doing.

[10 : 45] And the reason why Jesus says stay awake is so that you actually get on with the task that he has given you to do. And in the same way, people can actually be in a job but not do the job. You know, we used to say, I used to say to certain laborers that came out on my gang, do you know, I've had backache all day.

And they would look at me, why have you had backache all day? I said, because I'm just fed up with carrying you. You've done nothing. And so it is possible to be in a job. The same thing was said to me when I was a laborer. We don't think it's ever true. We just say it to those, because it happened to us, you then have to pass it on. You feel a sense of injustice if you don't.

And so it is possible to be involved in a job and not actually carry out the job. You can be in an office shuffling paper, but you're not actually doing the job. You're there.

You look as if you're doing what everybody else is doing, but you're not doing. And Jesus actually only says here, there's one thing. In fact, it's the one thing that he gives the church to do at the very end of the Gospel of Matthew. There is only one thing that we have to do as Christians, and that is tell somebody else the Gospel. And if we're not doing that one thing, it is the equivalent of sleeping. You're sleeping according to Jesus. This is the one thing that we have to do, and it's the one thing that we are given to do, and it's the one thing that we will be judged accordingly. So Jesus says, you know, don't go to sleep, stay awake, and he says leading up to this, well, what are we to do? Well, the Gospel is to go out to all nations. The distinction here is not between doing something and not doing something. That's not the distinction that Jesus is making. The distinction that Jesus is making is between doing what he said to do and doing something else. You could be doing something else, but doing something else is equivalent of not doing what Jesus said to do. And it's no good to come to Jesus on the day of judgment and say, well, this took more time than I expected. I would have got around to doing what you said, but this doesn't cut it with Jesus. Why? Because the future is going to happen, and the judgment will happen in accordance with everything that leads up to that. So don't sleep. Don't sleep. Be spiritually awake and tell other people the Gospel. So Jesus is wondering if you're interested, because there is a judgment that is going to come. And the judgment that comes upon believers is whether or not we have proclaimed the Gospel to anybody else. There is no judgment for sin because we're forgiven in Christ. We stand before Christ, and there's nothing that God can hold against us because every sin has been taken away by the death and resurrection of Christ. There's no guilt.

There's no... But there will be the testing of the work that we have done. There will be the judgment according to whether or not we have served Jesus. So believers will be judged in accordance to whether or not they have spread the Word, and unbelievers will be judged in accordance to whether or not they have rejected the Word or because they have rejected the Word. Everything revolves around the proclamation of the Gospel. This is one of the reasons why Jesus Christ is not returned, and we'll get to that in a minute, okay? One of the reasons why Jesus Christ is not returned is because there's still a lot of people for Jesus to save. Think about it. If Jesus Christ, if we're told in Ephesians 1 that we are chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, when Jesus Christ died on the cross 2,000 years ago, okay, Jesus knew, or at least we know now, that He couldn't come back within those 2,000 years because we wouldn't be saved. And so if Jesus died on the cross to save me 2,000 years later, then it means that Jesus couldn't come back before that time because I couldn't be born, I couldn't hear the

[15 : 07] Gospel, and I couldn't repent and believe in the Gospel. Okay, so what about the people that Jesus has chosen before the foundation of the Word 5,000 years from now? Now, I know that you're not used to thinking like that because you think... You've been brought up to think, well, Jesus could come back at any time, but as we'll see here, Jesus seems to be hinting to the fact that I may not be back for a very long time. And the reason why I may not be back for a very long time is because people need to hear the Gospel. The people that have been chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, some of us existed in the first century, some of us existed in the second, some of us exist 2,000 years later, and there's no reason to think that some don't exist 5,000 years from now or even 10,000 years from now.

We're in such a small part of history, and it's quite foolish to make any judgments about the state of the church or the state of Christianity, bearing in mind that we don't know how much time there is yet to happen. This is how important it is. How are we to live? Well, we're to live as if Jesus could come back at any minute, but there's a big difference between living that way and that actually being the case. So how does the Gospel get from the first generation to this generation?

Well, it gets from the first generation to this generation by it being passed from one generation to the next. And how is the Gospel going to get from our generation to a generation 5,000 years from now? Well, it's going to happen in exactly the same way, by we passing the Gospel on. That's how it happens. It's really very, very simple, super simple of how people come to hear the Gospel and the church grows. This, see, the church can never shrink. A gulf membership can shrink because the moment you die, you get struck off the membership. But in the church, the moment you die, you simply move from the church militant to the church triumphant. There's no, you're not striking off the list. You're forever present with God. The church, in that sense, can never decrease. It may fluctuate throughout the years. We may just so happen to be 2,000 years from the death of Christ in a low period of the church. That's not to say in another 1,000 years the church couldn't be quite vibrant.

We just don't know. We don't judge according to the fluctuations. We judge according to the trend. And the trend is, is that the church cannot shrink by definition. People are always going to be saved, even though it doesn't look like that in our time frame that many people are coming to Christ.

But look how big the church is, and look how it continues to grow, and it will continue to grow, perhaps long after we have gone. And it grows by people proclaiming the gospel to each other.

[18:10] Now, what Jesus does here is he talks about two futures. And the question that we need to ask is a simple one. When Jesus speaks about the future here, does he mean our future or their future?

In other words, is Jesus speaking about their future but our past? In other words, it's already happened. Or is he speaking about the future in such a way that it's still our future?

And I think Jesus is doing both here. I think that it revolves around two questions. The first question is this, when will the temple end and what will the signs be? When will that end? You know, so chapter 13 beginning at verses 1 and 2, look at these beautiful stones, but I'll tell you not one stone will be left upon another. Okay, when will that end? And then secondly, when will the world end?

And what will be the signs for that? So I'm going to answer the second question first. When will the world end? Believe it or not, there's at least one guy I'm aware of that's actually set a brand new date. There seems to be at least one guy or woman throughout the generations that seems to be able to set dates. And this one is sometime next year in April. I can't remember, April the 23rd or something ridiculous like that. So do what you want to do now before it happens. We don't know. We don't know when the world went. And you can't always judge, well, we must be much. To say that we're closer to the end now than what we were yesterday is obvious. You know, I mean, of course we are.

So when people say now, compared to people 100 years ago, well, we're much closer to the end than you were. Well, of course you are. We're heading that way. But when will it end? I don't know. And Jesus says this in verse 32. But concerning that day or hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. No one knows. You just don't know. We don't know when it will happen. But we do know what we are to do in the meantime. Verse 10. The gospel must be proclaimed to all nations. In other words, God has a plan. And the plan is that men and women, boys and girls, get to hear the gospel. We do know, however, when the temple ended and when the stones were toppled down and there wasn't one stone left on top of the other and the tribulation happened. It was in AD 70.

[20 : 49] And this is why so much of what Jesus says makes sense to the people listening to him, because in your generation this will happen. And sure enough, it did happen in their generation, AD 70. The Romans came in, ransacked the temple, destroyed it, and just, that was their immediate future, but it's their past. But some have often believed that the abomination of desolation is still something to happen, and you'll notice that I'm putting it in the past.

And you're going to go to me, I've got a lot of questions. Yeah, but, yeah, but, what about, what about? Well, I've put all these things in the past because I think Jesus puts all these things in the past. They're in the future of the time that Jesus is speaking it. I'm not denying that.

Jesus is speaking about the future, but Jesus is saying these things in the day of Jesus. Okay? Jesus is saying these things in the day of Jesus to the people that were with him.

But their future is their past. It's not the same time frame. And so the temple is destroyed, the persecutions that happen, the abomination of desolation happens in their future, but our past. Now, why do I, why do I make that point? Well, if you think that Jesus here is not speaking about the past, he's actually speaking about a future that's still yet to happen, just ask yourself the question. Just stop and pause and ask yourself the question. If it's the case that Jesus is speaking about a future yet to come, why does he tell these people to flee? There'd be no reason to tell these people to flee and run to the mountains if it isn't going to happen in their day. There'd just be no need to say it. Flee from what? Flee from something that's going to happen 10,000 years later? Well, why would I flee? Okay? It only makes sense if the abomination of desolation and the destruction of the temple is happening in their day because Jesus tells them to flee. He tells them to run to the mountains.

It is in the future, but it's not in our future. It's in their future, which is our past. And so, Jesus states, verse 30, that this generation will witness these things. This generation will not pass away until all these things happen, which they did in AD 70. They've happened. And then Jesus says, verse 31, that it's the end of the age. And of course, Scripture always speaks of two ages, doesn't he? Or Scripture. It speaks of the Jewish aeon, the Jewish age, which came to its end in AD 70.

[23 : 32] And then it speaks of the Christian age, which began with Jesus Christ, really, and his cross and resurrection. And you get this wonderful overlap. It's very similar to a relay race, where we've all seen a relay race, so we all understand how something can still be coming to the end as the other thing begins. And as one runner is coming to the end, the other runner has already begun. So you've got two people running at the same time. And before this one comes to the end, this one's already began to run.

And then you have this wonderful exchange where the new age continues. AD 70 was the exchange of the baton. The Christian age has already begun, and the Jewish age is still coming to the end.

And you get this wonderful exchange in which Jesus says, verse 31, heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. And we can speak about how is it that we have a new heavens and a new earth at the end of AD 70. Well, I think it's quite clear, but that's for another time. If you want to speak to me afterwards about that, then you're more than happy to do that. Remember, what do people do in the new heavens and the new earth according to Isaiah? They die. So the new heavens and the new earth cannot be speaking about a time where there is no pain or no death. Okay, ultimately it leads to that, but it cannot mean that according to it. Isaiah doesn't think that it means that. So we have this wonderful exchange where you have the Christian age beginning and the Jewish age coming to its end.

And this wonderful exchange happens in AD 70, and that's why he says the next verse that effectively the heavens and the earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. This generation will get to see everything that has happened. It wouldn't make sense if this is still to happen in the future for Jesus to say those words to those people. It just wouldn't make sense at all.

So moving on then, verses 24 to 27 and verses 32 to 36 is concerning the future, and that is our future. In other words, it's concerning the period of time that is yet to happen. In other words, it's concerning the end of the end times. So is it right to say that we're in the end times? Yes. But are we in the end of the end times? No, I don't think we are. I don't think we are because of what Jesus clearly points out here. We don't know how long it will be. We don't know when Jesus will return, and so there's no point trying to figure it out and sticking, you know, videos on blogs or adverts in newspapers. We just don't know when Jesus will return. The second coming, the end of the world, is something that people cannot escape from. So if Jesus was talking about the end of the world here, in which no one can escape, why does he tell people to flee? Well, it's clearly the case that he's not talking about the end of the world, because you can't flee from that. So on both accounts, whether you take the the AD 70 or this, it doesn't make any sense for this abomination of desolation and these stones to be tumbled down, as though it's still to happen. It doesn't make any sense at all. All these things can only happen, Jesus can only say all these things, if it happens in the days that Jesus is speaking about, in AD 70. You can't read it any other way, because no one can flee from the final judgment. This is why it says in Hebrews, how can you escape if you neglect such a great salvation? You can't. There's nowhere to run to. There's nowhere to flee. You can't go anywhere.

[27 : 33] And so remember this. It is the case that Jesus may not be back for a very long time. He could be back tomorrow, but it is also true that he may not be back for a very long time. And one of the reasons why he may not be back for a very long time is, as I've already said at the beginning, that because the elect are chosen before the foundations of the earth, why has it taken so long? Because the elect are chosen before the foundations of the earth, according to Ephesians 1, we don't know who they are or in what generation they live. The fact that God chose me in Christ before the foundation of the world, even before the cross, and the cross sort of officiated it, recognized it, accomplished my salvation. It meant that in order for me to hear the gospel, 2,000 years had to pass. But the same is true for all those people who might be saved 10,000 years or 5,000 years from now. It can't happen in any other way. But how does the gospel get there? Well, it gets from this generation to that generation by every generation in between spreading the gospel.

This is why, if you think about it, just for a moment, it's impossible to get to the point where everybody in the world hears the gospel. Because everybody's dying and everybody's being born.

You're never going to get to the point where you're going to be able to catch up that kind of trend. You're never going to get there. Now, if you had a static number on the world, let's say 7 billion, and the world didn't grow any more, then it is possible, theoretically speaking, to get the gospel out to 7 billion people because you're not chasing anything. You're chasing a definite stop. But the world doesn't work like that. People live, people die, and the gospel goes on. And this is something that Jesus clearly wants us to bear in mind. The gospel must go out to all nations. So remember what the Bible teaches. The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ is coming back, but in the meantime, we have something to do. And that something to do is to proclaim the gospel. It is to tell the next generation the same truths that we have heard from the previous generation. That Jesus Christ is both Lord and

Savior, who died on the cross to forgive you of your sins and to make you right with God. Anything else is almost wasting time. Or at least not making the best use of the time that we have.

So how should we live? Should we live as if Jesus isn't coming back in our lifetime? No, because we don't know that. But should we live as if he is coming back in our lifetime? Well, no, not that either. But how should we live then? Well, we should live as if he could come back tomorrow.

[30 : 39] But in the meantime, make every plan to proclaim the gospel today, tomorrow, the next day, the next month, the next year. We need to be planning to spread the gospel. So we live as if he could come back, but we live as if he may not as well. So that we make plans, strategic plans, to proclaim the gospel to whoever we meet. And the gospel that Jesus wants us to proclaim is a gospel that goes out to all nations and doesn't bypass your neighbors. Okay? The church is fond in sending missionaries overseas that bypass neighbors.

I'm all in favor. In fact, how could we not be, bearing in mind that we have missionaries from this church overseas, which we support. But at the same time, it makes no sense to take the gospel out there whilst you skip over a load of people here.

How does that work? Well, it's almost as if we're trying to get it out as fast as we can. Quick, let's cover the world.

Okay. Take it out to all nations, but on the way to the nations, you have to walk by your front door and your neighbor's front door. That's how you get there. There is no other way of getting there.

James teaches us that it is possible that we can be hearers of the word only, hence why he has to tell us to be doers of the word. But notice what he says. He doesn't tell us to be doers, and the contrast isn't between doing and not doing. The contrast is between doing the word and not doing the word. Okay, so I want you to forget a minute about all the service you render in the church. Forget about all the service you render, and there's a lot of people in this church who serve in a lot of different ways. Just forget about it. But just remember this one, the one where you spread the gospel. Well, actually, I haven't got that one to remember.

[32 : 38] Right. Now you see the issue. The issue is that we can be busy doing nothing, even though that nothing in the function of the church seems incredibly important. But at the end of the day, if we're not doing the one thing, if we're not doing the word and we're only hearing the word, you can understand why the church doesn't grow, why any church doesn't grow. The only way believers become believers is because, or the only way unbelievers become believers is by hearing the word of God. So if we're not doing that bit, whatever else we're doing, we're hearers only.

We're doers in the other areas of serving, which is right and just. All these people out in Sunday school, what are they doing? Are they minding children? Yeah. Are they giving children a little bit of drinking food? Yeah. Are they sitting at tables? Yeah. But what, why are they doing all of that?

Because that undergirds the proclamation of the gospel to these children. So I'm not saying that other things don't go along with it. In the same way you have a group of leaders that do different things on a what night or on a YP night, the reason you need all those leaders is to undergird the proclamation of the gospel that happens in those groups. That's why all these other things happen.

judgment doesn't fall on a church, it falls on an individual. When Jesus says, on that great and final day when we come before him, well, we had a great church with plenty of evangelistic events and I served the tea and Jesus is going to go, thank you for serving the tea for me. But I also ask you to proclaim the gospel. Okay. Thank you for putting out the chairs, but I also ask you to proclaim the gospel. Okay. It is right and just that we serve Jesus by setting out chairs. In fact, you give glory to God by doing it for Jesus. But don't forget what else Jesus said. Put the chairs out, but don't forget to proclaim the gospel. Okay. The reason why this is possible, why this is true is because churches don't face the judgment. Christians do. Churches are not asked about their evangelistic efforts.

Christians are. And so it's no good sitting behind the defense of, well, I was in a church that did evangelistic events. What about a church that doesn't do any evangelistic events? Well, that isn't the issue. The issue is whether or not you, me, is actually sharing the gospel to anybody else.

[35 : 04] So in conclusion, remember what Jesus says, stay awake or wake up. Wake up to the mission of God on earth, which is the proclamation of the gospel to your neighbors, to the nations. And to get there, you have to walk by your neighbor's door. Jesus says his going and return will be like this.

It is like a man going on a journey, verse 34, when he leaves his home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. Verse 35, therefore stay awake. Amen.