

"The End of the Age" - Mark 13:1-37

Some of you might have noticed that I've been picking up the pace a bit lately. I would really like to make it to the Resurrection of Jesus on Resurrection Sunday. I suppose that's a little OCD, but it is my motivation. On the other hand, it's hard for me to go quickly through scripture because it is so rich. There is just so much there.

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

But this week, I feel that I need to skim over a couple of events recorded in Mark's Gospel. So, I'd like for you to bail me out by reading Mark 12:35-44 on your own. I believe those passages are related to what we are going to look at this morning, as is all of chapters 11 and 12, because when Jesus entered Jerusalem for His last Passover, there are two conflicting agendas that we see over and over again. The first is Jesus revealing and condemning the hypocritical worship and the hypocritical leadership of the religious elite and the second is the attempts by the religious leaders to discredit and destroy Jesus.

So, in Chapter 12:35-40, Jesus stumps these religious leaders with one theological question and then explicitly warns of the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. And then, in verses 41-44, Jesus points out a striking example of that hypocrisy. It has to do with the meager offering of a poor widow. Yes, Jesus commends the poor widow, but the real message is that the religious system had become so corrupt, that it left this poor widow in such desperate straits. James says:

Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world. (James 1:27)

How far is that from the religion of the Pharisees and the Sadducees?

Then, as Jesus and His disciples leave Jerusalem to travel back to Bethany for the evening, those events must have been foremost in the Lord's mind. They were leaving a magnificent, beautiful Temple, but in reality, it was a Temple designed to exalt men, not God. They were leaving an incredibly complex, impressive, yet corrupt religious system. Unfortunately, the message Jesus had been delivering seems to have slipped by His disciples. They were still in awe of the Temple and its worship, but that system belonged to an age that was coming to an end.

Then as He went out of the temple, one of His disciples said to Him, "Teacher, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here!" (Mark 13:1)

The disciples were blown away with the architecture of the Temple and it was amazing, a building of shining white marble and gold, with bronze entrance doors, it was said that you could not look at the Temple in daylight as it would blind you. No wonder the disciples were impressed. But then in response, Jesus hits them with a bombshell.

And Jesus answered and said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone shall be left upon another, that shall not be thrown down." (Mark 13:2)

This wonder of the world was going to be destroyed? I'm sure that caused a buzz, a murmuring between the disciples as they walked along. And by the time they climbed up to the flanks of the Mount of Olives, that overlooked the Temple complex, their curiosity cried out to be satisfied.

Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked Him privately, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign when all these things will be fulfilled?" (Mark 13:3-4)

Here in Mark, we see a two-part question: When is this going to happen and how to we know when it is about to happen? (That's the sign they were requesting.) From Matthew's account, we learn there was a third part to the question.

"Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" (Matthew 24:3)

They also wanted to know when Jesus would return. So, Jesus set about answering their question, or questions, actually. This is prophecy. And much of this particular prophecy has already been fulfilled. It happened in 70 AD when the Roman armies under Titus laid siege to Jerusalem, burned and completely destroyed the Temple. Not one stone remained in place. But there is part of this prophecy that has not yet taken place. It has to do with Jesus' second advent, when He will come with all power to judge the world.

And Jesus, answering them, began to say: "Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am He,' and will deceive many. But when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be troubled; for such things must happen, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be earthquakes in various places, and there will be famines and troubles. These are the beginnings of sorrows. (Mark 13:5-8)

As we read these words, we would do well to ask the question: What, exactly is Jesus referring to when He talks about this tribulation? Is He referring only to the events leading up to 70 AD? Some scholars believe that. That is called the "preterist" view, that everything in this prophecy has already taken place. Or is Jesus referring to a tribulation that will happen shortly before His return?

I've often tried to remind you that Biblical prophecy is never given so we can write a detailed history ahead of time. But Biblical prophecy often has both a short-term and a longer-term fulfillment. The judgment of Jerusalem that occurred in 70 AD, I believe, is a type, or a foreshadowing of the much greater destruction that will occur after Jesus returns.

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. (2 Peter 3:10)

So, if you ask me, "Is Jesus referring to the 70 AD judgment of Jerusalem or the final Day of the Lord?" My answer would be "Yes". We need to pay attention to the Lord's exhortations. We need know what the Lord tells us to watch out for. We need to be doing what the Lord tells us to do.

And Jesus tells us, "*Take heed that no one deceives you.*" Folks, that means that it is possible for us to be deceived. False Christs and false prophets have been showing up for 2,000 years. Wars and rumors of wars, natural disasters, and all sorts of unhappiness have been the lot of humankind since the very beginning and Jesus tells us, "*See that you are not troubled.*"

I want to stress this to you. If you have confessed Jesus as your Lord, if you believe God has raised Him from the dead, if you have submitted to His authority, you have nothing to

worry about. Yes, you will face tribulation in this world. Yes, things will get ugly and uncomfortable. But Jesus is with you, even until the end of the age and He has overcome the world. **See that you are not troubled!**

"But watch out for yourselves, for they will deliver you up to councils, and you will be beaten in the synagogues. You will be brought before rulers and kings for My sake, for a testimony to them. And the gospel must first be preached to all the nations. But when they arrest you and deliver you up, do not worry beforehand, or premeditate what you will speak. But whatever is given you in that hour, speak that; for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit. Now brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end shall be saved. (Mark 13:9-13)

Most of this passage consists of bad news, doesn't it? Many will be offended and betray and hate one another. Many will be deceived by false prophets. The love of many will grow cold, but if you endure to the end, you will be saved.

Not everyone in the visible Church is really a Christian. You know that, don't you? There are tares among the wheat. Many who say to Jesus "Lord, Lord," never knew Him in the first place. But the elect, the authentic Christians will never fall away.

All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out. (John 6:37)

Jesus said that, and He meant it. He also said,

This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. (John 6:39)

So, if you are placing your faith, your hope, and all your confidence in Jesus Christ, you have nothing to worry about. You will endure to the end because Jesus will make sure you endure to the end. And you will be among the witnesses who preach the gospel of the kingdom with your lifestyle and your testimony.

"Therefore when you see the 'ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place" (whoever reads, let him understand), "then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take anything out of his house. And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes. But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath. For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened. (Matthew 24:15-22)

Here is a classic example of a prophecy that has multiple fulfillments. We first hear of the Abomination of Desolation in Daniel 9 and the first fulfillment of this prophecy took place during the time of the Maccabees. In 167 B.C., Antiochus Epiphanies set up an altar to Zeus over the altar of burnt offerings in the Jewish temple in Jerusalem. He also sacrificed a pig on that altar. The Jewish rabbis in the First Century called this the Abomination of Desolation and everyone understood that. But Jesus was clearly talking about something that would happen in the future. In 70 AD, the armies of Titus marched in with their standards bearing images of Roman gods. Most of the church fathers, like

Augustine and John Chrysostom believed this was what Jesus was talking about. So, did most of the reformers in the 16th and 17th Centuries. And certainly, that was a horrible time to be a resident of Jerusalem. It was a great tribulation. Josephus talks about residents resorting to cannibalism as the food supply was completely cut off ... a horrible tribulation. But this could also refer to something that will happen just before Jesus returns. Many scholars believe that it will be the final Antichrist who will set up this abomination. But rather than try to figure out history ahead of time, let's pay attention to how Jesus wants us to respond.

"Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'Look, He is there!' do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will rise and show signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. But take heed; see, I have told you all things beforehand. (Mark 13:21-23)

So many people have been deceived over the years by preachers with slick deliveries and magnetic personalities, preachers who claimed to be something they were not. It's how Christian cults arise ... and there have been many. If you do not want to be deceived, you need to develop a passionate love of the truth and the truth is found in this Bible. We must be people of this Book and we need to test every teaching by comparing it to the truth of this Book, because ...

The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness. (2 Thessalonians 2:9-12)

Are you reading your Bibles, people? Are you making it a priority to digest the truth of God's word? If you aren't, you are in great peril!

If somebody tells you that Jesus has returned and you need to go somewhere to find Him, you are listening to a false prophet. Because, when Jesus comes back, it will not be a secret event. Nobody is going to miss it.

"But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars of heaven will fall, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. And then He will send His angels, and gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest part of earth to the farthest part of heaven. (Mark 13:24-27)

Oh, what a glorious Day that will be! By the way, verse 27 clearly talks about the gathering of the saints. The farthest part of heaven, I believe, refers to those saints who have laid aside their mortal bodies. The farthest part of earth refers to those who are alive and remain until Jesus returns. He is going to get them all, and we often call this the rapture of the Church.

But please notice, it will be "*in those days, after that tribulation.*" Friend, if you are placing your hope in a pre-tribulation rapture, I say to you, be careful. Because this, and many other passages of scripture seem to argue against it. I don't want you to be one of those who fails of faith because you encounter extremely harsh tribulation that you thought you were going to avoid. Personally, I'd be extremely happy to be taken by the

Lord before stuff really goes sideways. So, it's okay to pray for a pre-tribulation rapture, but, I think we'd better prepare for a post-tribulation gathering of the saints.

I'm certainly not smart enough to write history ahead of time. I don't believe that is what Jesus wants us to do. But I do know He wants us to be prepared ... always prepared.

"Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender, and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see these things happening, know that it is near—at the doors! Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away. (Mark 13:28-31)

Scholars have been debating what Jesus means by "this generation" for centuries. Preterists love this passage because they point out that "this generation" must refer to those people who were alive at that time and so, they argue, Jesus must have been referring to the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD. But I have to believe that Jesus had been talking explicitly about his glorious return, so "this generation" could refer to those who are alive at the time of the final Great Tribulation.

The most important thing we can take from this is the absolute inevitability of Jesus' second coming. It is going to happen. It is going to happen whether you are ready or not and trust me, it is best to be ready because next time, He is not coming as a suffering servant. He is coming as a conquering King taking awful vengeance on His enemies.

"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is. It is like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch. Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming—in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning—lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!" (Mark 13:32-37)

No preacher can tell you exactly when Jesus is coming back. If they try, they are one of a long line of false prophets. Nobody knows the day and the hour. What I will tell you today is, you need to be ready because in your natural state, you are a sinner guilty of cosmic treason. You have already earned your just wage.

For the wages of sin is death, (Romans 6:23)

That is hell, folks. It is an eternity of the most intense torture. The flames of the pit are burning seven times hot and you are hanging over them by a thread.

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23)

God loves you so much that He sent Jesus to take the hit for you. Jesus suffered and died on the cross so you wouldn't have to endure that horrible eternity and all He asks in return is that you just trust Him. Submit to His Lordship.

Because if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. (Romans 10:9)

Don't wait another moment to give your life fully to Jesus Christ. Nobody knows the day or hour of His return but when He does return, it will be too late.

Serve the LORD with fear, And rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, And you perish in the way, When His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him. (Psalms 2:11-12)