

Mark 13. 14-37

Back to the Future

Part Two: Onward into the time between the trees

Introduction

- Last week we began a two-part journey through Mark 13 – Jesus’ longest speech in the whole book, wherein he talks all about the future.
- As Jesus talks about the future we considered how important it is to read his words as he intended them and not to get distracted with trying to pinpoint exact details about the future (or last days / end times) but understand why he said what he did.
 - His intent was preparation, warning and encouragement.
 - Much of what he says was concerning the disciple’s future mission and how they lived.
- So what did we learn from Jesus?
 - We are God’s temple. We house God’s Spirit.
 - God’s Spirit is in us for a reason – to deliver the good news about deliverance.
 - God’s Spirit will give us what we need (especially the words) for where we’re sent.
- Consider the attached chart in last week’s notes last week’s notes.

Mark 13. 14-37

Part Two: Onward into the time between the trees

- The time in between the trees is indeterminate. We know when this time started (the cross and resurrection) but we don’t know when it will come to a close.

12 *“A brother will betray his brother to death, a father will betray his own child, and children will rebel against their parents and cause them to be killed. 13 And everyone will hate you because you are my followers. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.*

14 *“The day is coming when you will see the sacrilegious object that causes*

*desecration standing where he should not be.” (Reader, pay attention!) “Then those in Judea must flee to the hills. **15** A person out on the deck of a roof must not go down into the house to pack. **16** A person out in the field must not return even to get a coat. **17** How terrible it will be for pregnant women and for nursing mothers in those days. **18** And pray that your flight will not be in winter. **19** For there will be greater anguish in those days than at any time since God created the world. And it will never be so great again. **20** In fact, unless the Lord shortens that time of calamity, not a single person will survive. But for the sake of his chosen ones he has shortened those days.*

- Last week we looked at Jesus’ prediction of the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. We mentioned that this was a historical fact – during the Roman-Jewish wars in 70AD the temple was destroyed, as was all of Jerusalem.
 - It would seem that these words are then speaking to the impending calamity Jerusalem will see in about forty years.
- This directs us to our first “end times” or “last days” lesson. When we read words like these they may be pointing to a *near future* or *distant future*.
- The second lesson follows quickly: predictions like these can have multiple fulfillments.
 - Biblical prophecy *can* be fulfilled differently in different times. So, a prophecy might be fulfilled in one time, but still be applicable in another time in another way. Biblical prophecy can have multiple fulfillments.
- With this in mind, let's consider some facts about biblical study which will help us in grasping this passage.
 - There are differing perspectives on some of the details in Mark, though general agreement about its major message and themes (who Jesus is, what he’s done for us, and how we can follow him).
 - This passage is an example of when people differ on exactly what it means and how and when these events will take place.
 - Some think it’s all near future, some think it’s distant, some think it’s a mixture of both.
 - Jesus is graciously giving forewarning to future challenges, so his followers won’t be struck unawares when difficulties arise.

With that, a couple of notes on what we've just read:

- Some interpret much of chapter 13, including the passage we've just read, as what occurred during the Roman-Jewish wars, and the destruction of Jerusalem.
 - The temple will be desecrated with sacrilegious objects brought by the Romans and Jerusalem went through a terrible ordeal. Others believe the temple was already desecrated based on Jesus' condemnation of it, and it's corruption and Jesus is referencing this.
- Still others interpret this passage as actually speaking about the very end times, signaling when Jesus is about to return.
- Based on the differing interpretations, it's easy to see why it's important not to get caught up in over-interpreting the passage – making dramatic claims and exact timelines relating to the end times – as some have become accustomed to doing.
- Let's draw our attention to verse 20 which shares God's heart under any interpretation – whether Jesus is referring to the impending hardship Jerusalem is facing, or a later time during the last days, God is gracious in shortening a clearly tumultuous time for the near or future generations. That's God's character.
- All of this thinking also applies to what Jesus has to say next.

21 *"Then if anyone tells you, 'Look, here is the Messiah,' or 'There he is,' don't believe it. 22 For false messiahs and false prophets will rise up and perform signs and wonders so as to deceive, if possible, even God's chosen ones. 23 Watch out! I have warned you about this ahead of time!*

24 *"At that time, after the anguish of those days, the sun will be darkened,*

the moon will give no light,

25 *the stars will fall from the sky,*

and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

26 *Then everyone will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds with great power and glory. 27 And he will send out his angels to gather his chosen ones from all over the*

world—from the farthest ends of the earth and heaven.

- I'm sure you can sense the challenge for Biblical scholars in this portion of Mark.
 - The Earlier part of the passage sounds a lot like Jesus' words that we walked through last week – Watch out! Don't be deceived by leaders promising liberty that don't have Jesus' character and vision.
 - During the Roman-Jewish wars there were rebellion leaders promising liberty, but it was a political liberty and Jesus was bringing something broader and better.
- The quote we see here in verses 24 and 25 (about the sun and moon) is a combined language from Isaiah 13 and 34. It *could* be strong imagery speaking of the kind of destruction Jerusalem is going to experience during the wars, or it could be language depicting creation's reaction to Jesus' second coming.
- Verse 26 can also be understood in different ways, with Jesus coming on the clouds, gathering God's people from all end of the earth and so on.
 - Much of what we read here is rooted in Old Testament references and imagery for God's judgment and salvation – especially the part about Jesus coming on the clouds. So, is this Scriptural, imagery surrounding God's work of salvation through Jesus, or a literal prediction of how Jesus will return? Opinion varies.
- It's the same with the mention of angel's who gather people from all over the earth.
 - This translation reads “angels”, but the literal Greek translates “messengers”.
 - This means Jesus could be speaking of a moment during the end times when God gathers people up, or could be speaking to how the apostles (messengers) and new Christians are sent out to bring all people home up with the good news of Jesus.

28 *“Now learn a lesson from the fig tree. When its branches bud and its leaves begin to sprout, you know that summer is near. 29 In the same way, when you see all these things taking place, you can know that his return is very near, right at the door. 30 I tell you the truth, this generation will not pass from the scene before all these things take place. 31 Heaven and earth will disappear, but my words will never disappear. 32 “However, no one knows the day or hour when these things will happen, not even the angels in heaven or the Son himself. Only the Father knows. 33 And since you don’t know when that time will come, be on guard! Stay alert!”*

- At this point some see Jesus continuing to speak about Jerusalem’s immediate future, and some see Jesus speaking about the end times.
 - Regardless of the timing of events, it’s impossible to get away from Jesus’ interest in the disciples being alert, ready, aware! There’s a sense of urgency in all of chapter 13.
 - What *do we hear* Jesus say again, “Stay Alert” or “Watch out”. Have you been counting? That’s four times we’re told to watch out or stay alert.
 - As Mark records Jesus’ words, this urgency shouldn’t be lost on us. Christians living 40 years after Jesus or 2000 years after, should take note of Jesus’ forewarning to “stay alert”! Alert for what? We’ll get to that.
- Toward the end of the passage we have this question of only God the Father knowing the time when all these things will happen. This has been confusing for some.
 - As we’ve read Mark we’ve seen Jesus live out God’s mission as an obedient son. So, this language doesn’t mean Jesus is not fully God, somehow less than, but that he lives in loving obedience to the Father. We’ll see this more explicitly in Gethsemane when Jesus says yes to the cross.
 - This language is about submission and trust, not whether or not Jesus is a little “less than God”. The inner workings of the Trinity, between Father, Son and Spirit might be a little beyond our grasp, and that’s okay.

- All this might seem a little confusing, if you're a little lost you're in good company. People have been studying these words for hundreds of years and are still discussing how to best understand them.
- This is part of the beauty of scripture, however. God's heart and message is wonderfully clear, but there the depth to explore is inexhaustible.
- If you feel a little confused – on this side of the cross and resurrection – imagine how Peter, James, John and Andrew must have felt!
- But don't worry – Jesus is coming to the rescue and not the kind of rescue we might expect.

34 *"The coming of the Son of Man can be illustrated by the story of a man going on a long trip. When he left home, he gave each of his servants instructions about the work they were to do, and he told the gatekeeper to watch for his return. 35 You, too, must keep watch! For you don't know when the master of the household will return—in the evening, at midnight, before dawn, or at daybreak. 36 Don't let him find you sleeping when he arrives without warning. 37 I say to you what I say to everyone: Watch for him!"*

- Can you remember when we walked through a lot of the parables in Mark, and there were moments when we thought they were confusing?
 - The funny thing about parables is that they can seem mysterious, and that mystery can be a little frustrating. What exactly does Jesus mean? Why doesn't he just spell it out?
 - Perhaps the parables are not meant to keep us in the dark, or mystify and confuse us. Perhaps the parables exist because it is by illustration and story that we best learn. Parables best express the complex and comprehensive gravity of the kingdom of God.
 - Here, we've got a wonderful example of when a parable is actually a blessing from Jesus – it is so helpful and aids us in focusing on what Jesus' wants us to focus on.
- Jesus basically wraps up his speech to the inner circle with, "Look, a lot is going to happen between now and when I return. It's kind of like..."

- Interestingly, this is the last parable Jesus will tell before he dies, and it's strikingly similar to the story he tells in Mark 12 about the evil tenant farmers.
 - Perhaps it's meant to contrast it. Perhaps Jesus aiming to warn his disciples not to follow in the footsteps of the Temple leaders.
- So, this parable draws us into Jesus' intention to speaking about all of these things in the first place.
 - Don't be put to sleep – keep watch, stay alert, involved. (4 times). No one knows the day or hour. Jesus doesn't want his disciples to be caught off guard, distracted or discouraged when Jerusalem is torn to bits. He wants to give them warning, but he also wants to give them instructions.
 - Ultimately, focus on the mission you have been given.

Discussion Questions

- Are we alert or are we asleep? Are we distracted and cluttered Temples or God-honoring, dedicated to directing others toward a loving Creator?
- What is alertness? Watching for Jesus coming on the clouds? Or is alertness more about what we've read in the whole passage about:
 - The Gospel going to all nations.
 - The messengers gathering up all people into God's family.
 - The servants being about the master's business?
- What is alertness to you?