

The End of the Old, Part 1

Mark: The Gospel of the Kingdom

Mark 13:1-13

September 24, 2017

PD Mayfield

This has been a wonderful morning, and much of what Anthony just shared and prayed for we will providentially get to look at in Mark Chapter 13. So please turn with me in your Bibles to the Gospel of Mark, and we'll be looking at the first thirteen verses of the chapter.

And so what does Jesus himself have to say about hurricanes, for instance. Or maybe another way of saying it, what does Jesus have to say about the end of things, the end of days. Are his predictions that he makes in this chapter about events in the disciples' future, but our past? Or is he saying something about things to come, even in our future. So we're going to divide this chapter into three sermons to look at this, of what Jesus is talking about.

Now where we are in the Gospel of Mark is we are trucking along to the final act. We are finishing what sometimes is called "The Judgment of Israel." Jesus has entered Jerusalem in Chapter 11, and he has left Jerusalem here at the beginning of Chapter 13. And his public ministry has finished, but yet there is work that he will do that is still left to be done. Follow along as I read the passage this morning. Mark 13:1-13.

¹And as he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!" ²And 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."

³And as he sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately, ⁴"Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?" ⁵And Jesus began to say to them, "See that no one leads you astray. ⁶Many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he!' and they will lead many astray. ⁷And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. This must take place, but the end is not yet. ⁸For 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.

⁹"But be on your guard. For they will deliver you over to councils, and you will be beaten in synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them. ¹⁰And the gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations. ¹¹And 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 you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit. ¹²And brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death. ¹³And you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

The word of the Lord. (Thanks be to God.) Let's pray together. Lord, add understanding to our ears. May we be mindful of what you are teaching. May we understand it fully in our hearts and may we live faithfully with our lives. Help us by your Spirit. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Did you know that September 23, 2017, was supposed to be the end of the world? Or at least an important convergence of astronomical events that supposedly fulfill biblical prophecy and serve as time keepers for the end to come. I had cinnamon raisin toast and eggs with sriracha. The solar eclipse and earthquake in Mexico, the rapid succession of hurricanes, as mentioned: Harvey, Irma, Jose, ~~Mariah~~ Maria, certainly grab people's attention and play on our fears. But are these recent events signs of the apocalypse? I didn't pick Mark 13 because yesterday was supposed to be the end. I didn't pick Mark 13 because of all these hurricanes. We're just going through the Gospel and here we are.

It's quite natural to be overwhelmed when we look at these things together, especially with today's technology. We are aware of a lot all around the world. We get overwhelmed with the tragedy, and we wonder what is happening. When you get hit in the face once and then twice and then a third time, you begin to wonder if you're in a boxing match. We like to know things. More than that, we particularly enjoy the unveiling of an unknown, like when we see the headlines of some new archaeological discovery or perhaps the unveiling of the whodunnit at the end of a mystery novel or the disclosure of a long kept secret. These things shed light on past events and they shade new meaning on the significance.

And the disciples were no different. They were amazed at Jesus's bold prediction, and they were very much curious about the details. On one hand there is a positive side to seeking answers about these possible cataclysmic events sometime in the future which could drastically alter the world as we know it. You want to be prepared. You want to know how to react. But on the other hand there are downsides to finding answers, because you could very easily say, well, I don't have to react today. I can prepare tomorrow.

In Mark Chapter 13 this is one of the longest blocks of teaching that Jesus does in the Gospel of Mark. It's the second big block that he does in the Gospel of Mark, but it's certainly the longest. And here he is about to be on the verge of his trial and crucifixion, and he's taking time to say something to his disciples. And what does he say? He makes a final declaration of judgment against Jerusalem and its temple. And by doing so Jesus is disclosing something. He's unveiling something to the disciples about how he is bringing an end to the old and how the Kingdom of God is ushering in the new.

And so today the text that we are looking at is going to tell us three things. It says more, of course, but we're going to look at how **Jesus Predicts Destruction**, how **Jesus Warns Against Deception**, and **Jesus Encourages Determination**.

So let's first look at how **Jesus Predicts Destruction**, verses 1 and 2. What prediction do we see Jesus making? He says in verse 2: "Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down." The occasion for these words are what follows with the unnamed disciple who is admiring the temple and the surrounding building complex. Jewish historian Josephus and Roman historian Tacitus both describe the temple's beauty of gold and white marble. Scholars estimate that Herod's temple, the temple that was there at the time of Jesus, was about twice the size of Solomon's. It was magnificent in its

construction and an enormous in its size. It is reasonable to think that Jesus said these words in public there in verse 2, and they are a dangerous statement, to be sure.

But why? His comments—we'll learn in a few chapters how these comments about the temple will be misused in his trial. But why else might these statements be dangerous? Jesus is challenging the very essence of the status of Jerusalem. He is asserting the temple—the very focal point of Israel's history, Israel's religious life, and Israel's political life—he is asserting that this focal point is coming to an end. Bold indeed.

You see, if the temple is not there, then the people cannot make sacrifices. If the temple is not there, then there is no Holy of Holies, which was the inner sanctum of the temple where the very presence of the Living God dwelled, his *kavod*, his glory, his weight. And if there is no Holy of Holies, then there can be no atonement for sin. And if the temple is not there, then God's people cannot come to worship and pray. If the temple is not there, then God is not there. If God is not with his people in the land, then indeed it would be an act of God's judgment upon Israel once again.

Jesus's prediction of destruction culminates the judgment he has already declared upon Jerusalem in Chapter 11 when he indicted them for making the temple a den of robbers instead of a house of prayer. And then later in Chapter 12 when Jesus compared the leaders to the tenants of the vineyard who killed the heir and the builders who rejected the stone which has now become the cornerstone. Such a prediction would indeed require fulfillment to vindicate him as a true prophet. You just can't make those claims and then have any credibility if they don't come true. And history does indeed vindicate Jesus. The Romans besieged Jerusalem and sacked the temple between the years 66 and 70 AD.

It is one thing for Jesus to predict the destruction in Israel's history, and is another thing to claim to be the very significance of that prediction. Anyone can make predictions. People were having... There were rumors and rumblings about civil war all through the 1850's, but Abraham Lincoln never claimed that the war was about him nor was his assassination any theological significance for the world. Jesus predicts destruction, and he claims that he is the Messiah who judges Israel and the world, but he is the Messiah who pours out grace by reconciling God and humanity through his own blood to make atonement, and who rules upon the throne of David over all nations with love.

It's due to this prediction, and it's because of his role, that **Jesus Warns Against Deception**, verses 3-8. In leaving the temple area for the last time he's concluding his public ministry. The time that remains he spends with his disciples before being put on trial and executed. Peter, James, John, and we see now Andrew, who are very much the inner circle of Jesus's entourage—they ask Jesus privately what he had said publicly about the temple. They ask in verse 4: “When will these things be, and what will be the sign...”

Do you remember when Jesus told his disciples he was going to suffer many things and be rejected by the leaders and be killed, only to rise three days later—what did Peter do? He rebuked Jesus, because he thought the Christ was not supposed to suffer humiliation, but rather be exalted in victory. Do you remember when Jesus told them again a second time what was going to happen, what did the disciples do? They were arguing about who was the greatest. And do you remember when Jesus told them a third time, what did James and John

do? They wanted to be on Jesus's left and right hand in his glory. Now that Jesus talks about the end of the temple, they are all ears. They wonder when it will take place. Don't tell me about your sufferings, tell me about when you're going to kick out the Romans. Tell me when you're going to restore Israel to its glory. Those are the things I want to hear about. Those are the things that pique my interest. I want to know about those things.

But the disciples are partly seeing Jesus more clearly as we walk through the Gospel of Mark, but they still misunderstand. They expect that the temple's destruction will coincide with the end of time. And so it's reasonable for them to ask what to look for. Now next week Pastor Randy will be preaching starting at verse 14, and this is where Jesus really gives a particular answer to this particular question, so I'll let him answer the question next week. So if you're unsatisfied with what's said today, maybe he'll do it better next week.

But what we do here in these verses, verses 3-8, is Jesus providing the understanding for his answer. He provides tools. And one tool he provides is discernment. Now why will discernment be important? Because verse 5: Jesus doesn't want his disciples to be led astray. Verse 6: He warns them, "Many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he!'" There will be people who claim to be the Messiah. And indeed there were leaders who sought to lead Israel against Rome. You can read this in Josephus, you can read this in other historians.

Also, the disciples must be discerning because there will be external forces that might distract them. The external forces that Jesus meant mentions are wars and the rumors of those wars, even earthquakes and famines. Now this language reflects common imagery used by the prophets in the Old Testament describing judgment, as well as the clashing of political kingdoms. These events, to the disciples, might be a distraction for several reasons. For example, they might be a distraction because the events themselves are misread. Verse 7: Jesus says not to be alarmed because "the end is not yet." Verse 8: They are "the beginning of the birth pains." Cataclysmic events were commonly called birth pains in the Old Testament to describe terrible suffering. Terrible suffering in general, and in particular the suffering that Israel would endure before God's deliverance—usually went hand in hand with his judgment upon his people.

It also might be a distraction because these tragic events can be the very situations where a leader could rise up and claim to be the Messiah. When there is tragedy and disruption and there is confusion and there is need for food and water and security, there needs to be order and structure and leadership and help. But remember what's incredibly important for this chapter as a whole, but specifically these first thirteen verses, is to keep in mind the context, that Jesus is referring specifically to the destruction of the temple, which happened in AD 70. Some people did rise up and declare themselves Messiah. And in rare occasions people may do that today.

However, it is more likely today that leaders might arise and come in their own name or their own nation, and instead of saying, 'I am he,' they may say, 'He is not he.' Just like his disciples then, Jesus is warning the church not to be swayed by people who claim to be a type of Messiah. So brothers and sisters, the invitation, the caution, the warning against deception is for us as well. It's for us to not be led astray by people that deceive us from trust in Jesus, the Messiah, the true Messiah. And likewise let us not be alarmed by the circumstances around us that distract us from trusting him, recognizing that he is already reigning over his kingdom now.

If these verses have told us to not be fooled, verses 9-13 tell us not to be naïve. Jesus is honest about future suffering his disciples may face, so he certainly encourages them to **Be Determined**, verses 9-13. In this section of the passage Jesus redirects the disciples' focus from what we should be looking for, to what we should be doing. And what should his disciples be doing? What's it say? It says we must "bear witness." Jesus has given his church the task of proclaiming the gospel message of Jesus Christ to the nations.

Where must we do it? Well, first, he describes opportunities to speak in the name of Christ to various societal institutions, such as places of religion and politics. And second, he describes opportunities to bear witness to the name of Christ in social institutions such as family. But did you notice the occasion for such opportunities, whether in synagogues, before kings, or in a divided family, the opportunity to bear witness to the kingdom of God is through suffering. Jesus recognizes how we might be anxious, certainly for what we might say. To bear witness is with our lives, but it also at times involves our words, as he's mentioned in the text.

And I don't know what your particular anxiety might be, but I know my own. And I know from my experience anxiety usually breeds more anxiety. If we are anxious about what we will say, then we easily become anxious about the situations that require us to speak. We can become anxious about the future looming of being anxious. And anxiety can certainly be a debilitating distraction from what our focus should be. It can be quite crippling. Maybe you know it.

So Jesus provides another tool. He provides the way to discern who is true—Jesus is the Messiah—from false. He also provides us the understanding when these things will happen through the encouragement to endure. He encourages a determination not rooted in ourselves, but in a love that cannot separate us from him. What does Romans 8 say? Not tribulation, distress, persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword can separate us from the love of Christ. Entrusting our lives in his care is an act of faith that rests on the promise of God and the provision of the Holy Spirit, who will not only give us the words to speak, but comfort us as we endure the suffering. The Holy Spirit is called the comforter. If you know your anxiety well, do you know the Holy Spirit well. Does he draw near to you in comfort.

And so Jesus spends his last days with his disciples encouraging them and preparing them for the days ahead. And his disciples must not be distracted by deception or by persecution. And so he says we must be on our guard. "The one who endures to the end will be saved." Verse 13. Now this does not mean that the one who endures earns salvation or the one who endures becomes worthy of receiving salvation. Mark is applying a term he has used quite often in the Gospel of Mark. Whereas usually he talks about it in a physical sense—being delivered from the demon possession or delivered from the health issues—here he is applying a spiritual sense, a spiritual fulfillment of the term. And so we must rely upon Jesus Christ for our salvation. And we must rely on him as we endure.

When we begin to rely on ourselves, then we may endure for a time. Some may endure longer than others, but we are all weak, and we are all corruptible, and we all have our breaking points. The determination Jesus encourages us to avoid can come in many ways, many variations. But in particular, when you are faced with such distress, such persecution, what is often presented is the way out. How do you end the pain. How do you in the suffering. How do you seek escape. When things get so bad, so stressful, so awful, that we would prefer to be

numb to the pain and the fatigue, how do we escape. How do you escape? When Jesus is calling you to be on your guard, to not be led astray, how do you do it? Certainly you can't do it on your own. But there are great temptations that will be particular for you on how you would want those things to come to an end. But Jesus calls us to endure.

Another version of escapism can even be spiritual piety. It's a version of escapism in this way. It is a recognition, or it's a desired recognition that the physical is so overbearing, so oppressive, that I've just got to spiritually escape it. That liberation comes from being spiritually lifted out of the physical, whether that's our physical bodies or the physical world. But it is some sort of sense of, well, this world is corruptible, so I long for an incorruptible spiritual realm. Now, that's not biblically incorrect, it's just biblically incomplete.

If you are a Christian, these are the very moments that make the destruction of the temple meaningful to you. Because when we worship God, we're very aware of Jesus paying it all. We're very aware of the need for his cross. And hopefully you're becoming more aware of the need for his resurrection. But do we even think about this historical event of how we need the destruction of the temple? What bearing does that have on me today? You see, the old is gone, and the new has come. We no longer need the temple to house God over there. No, we have Jesus Christ, the everlasting mediator, who has God dwelling with us. The Romans tore down Herod's temple, but in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ a new temple was built in his body—which certainly is physically his body, but also, then, we are his body. We are the new temple where God dwells.

That becomes how we endure. Because we are not striving to prove that we can endure, we're striving with the strength that we have in our union with Christ. I recently read an interesting observation that the New Testament... (Well, let me reverse it. I'll do a little of my own editing of it.) When we think about sufferings, we very much appreciate, and it is meaningful to us, to be mindful of how Jesus is with us in our affliction. He is present in our sufferings. But what is interesting about the New Testament, the apostles, and those early centuries of the church fathers, when people talked about sufferings, they talked about sharing in Christ's sufferings, not him sharing in ours.

Suffering is no longer a mark of judgment upon the people of God. Exile is no longer the picture of God being angry and sending his people away. No, now in Christ suffering becomes a part of God's mission to bring about redemption. And in the scattering of his people, again, that is not him dispersing his people to the ends of the earth because they are under God's judgment, but in Christ and under his grace his people are scattered to bear witness of his name. Suffering becomes redemptive in Christ.

So today is September 24, 2017. Yesterday has come and gone, and I see some empty chairs, but I'm pretty sure the end hasn't come yet. I don't know. I don't know what your view of eschatology might be, maybe you're looking around wondering. I don't know. But regardless of your eschatology, this is what Jesus is saying. So long as it is today, he wants his followers to look about. That is something that's beautiful about the original language in this chapter. He uses—Mark uses a word both in verse 3 (I'm sorry, verse 2) when Jesus says, Do you **see** these things? Verse 5: **See** that no one leads you astray. And verse 9: **Be on your guard**. He's using the same verb, and it is calling us to pay attention. It's calling us to behold. It's calling us to see with our eyes and understand with our perception.

We are to look about. We are to be watchful. We are to be prepared. We don't put our focused sight upon stones. We don't put our focused sight upon signs. We don't put our focus upon the possibility of persecution and be ruled by the anxiety of that. Rather, we put our focused sight upon Jesus Christ the Messiah, who willingly suffered on the cross for our atonement for sin, and who was vindicated in his resurrection. We believe, the church, that Jesus not only has been raised from the grave, but he has also ascended and is sitting at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty. And we believe he will come again. In the meantime, he wants his church to not be led astray and to be on our guard.

When we are anxious and distracted it is very natural to want to know when these things will happen and what the signs will be. But knowing *when* can dull our readiness. We can say, oh, it's next week. OK, I've got time. Knowing *what* can distract our watchfulness. We can say, oh, these things are not the end times, so I can ignore them for now. But instead of being anxious and distracted, the church has been given a task to bear witness to the joy and the hope that we have in Jesus Christ the Messiah, as we wait for his return. Jesus says the end is not now. But he also says the old has gone. The old is ended, and behold, the new is come. And so we can say both it is not yet and come, come, Lord Jesus. That is our hope as Christians, to live in that tension of the reality that his kingdom is now, and we await its final fulfillment.

Here in in these verses specifically he is talking about the destruction of the temple. Now as we move forward in the next couple weeks it gets interesting, because scholars disagree. Christians have disagreed on what Jesus is talking about. And so we're going to continue this discussion. But at the end of the day, what rules the context of this passage is what Jesus is saying. Don't be led astray. Be on guard. Don't be distracted by what you see around you. Be committed to the task that I'm giving. So we say, come, Lord Jesus.

Let's pray. Father in heaven, we beg of you to come, to send your Son, for his return. May that wash over us and may that penetrate our hearts in ways that wake us up to life, to hope, to renewal. And may it give us, by your grace, the very thing we need to endure, the very thing that we need for courage, the very thing we need for rest, the very thing we need to not be anxious. That we would rely upon the truth that you are indeed the Messiah, and indeed you have provided your Holy Spirit. And so we pray, Lord, watch over us by your grace and help us to walk in your ways. In Jesus' name. Amen.