



Christ Reformed Community Church

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“The Olivet Discourse, Part 1”

Take your Bibles and turn to Mark chapter 13, and we’ve been in the Gospel of Mark for quite some time, and this morning we’re really entering a new section of Mark’s Gospel. We’re going to look at just verses 1 through 8 this morning, and so I want you to stand in honor of the reading of God’s Word as I read it for us, and then we’ll begin studying it. But this is part of a larger section that we refer to as “The Olivet Discourse,” and it composes all of Mark chapter 13, but we’re just going to look at a sliver this morning. Picking up in verse 1:

And as he [that is, Jesus] came out of 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.”

Please be seated as God adds His blessing, as we ask Him to upon His Word, the reading of it and now the preaching of it as we go to Him in prayer.

Father, we come to this text, Lord, a very critical text, a very difficult text to understand and to interpret, so we especially ask for Your help this morning and for the weeks to come as we look at Mark 13 to give us guidance. May we be fully yielded to Your Holy Spirit. May Your Spirit illuminate these words like never before, Lord, so we can understand Your truth and its practical implications for our lives. We pray all of these things in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Well, I have read to you this morning Mark 13:1–8, which is only one-fourth, about a quarter of what Bible scholars believe to be one of the most, if not the most, difficult texts in all of the New Testament to interpret. It is certainly the most difficult text in the Gospel of Mark to interpret. So, our work is cut out for us as we enter this section of Scripture. It’s also the longest teaching discourse of Jesus that is given in Mark’s Gospel, and not only that, but it is the longest answer Jesus ever gave to any question that was asked of Him. Now, if you’ve been with us in previous weeks, you’ve seen many questions that were hurled at Jesus, particularly by the religious leaders,

and Jesus would answer those questions. And some of those questions would have rather lengthy answers, but nothing even comes close to the long-winded answer that Jesus gives here. In fact, after the question in verse 4, really questions in verse 4, verses 5 to the end of the chapter are Jesus’ answer that Mark records for us. At the same time, this is the most prominent text used by liberal scholars to attack, first of all, the deity of Jesus Christ as well as the veracity of the Holy Scriptures. We call it “The Olivet Discourse” because of its place, where it took place. This is also recorded in Matthew 24 and Luke 21. But many scholars refer to Mark 13 as a “little apocalypse” because of its prophecies. We call it “The Olivet Discourse” because of its place, geographically. Some people call it a “little apocalypse” because of its prophecies, theologically speaking.

Now, the word *apocalypse* simply means an unveiling. It is a term that is typically used to describe certain sections of Jewish literature that details God’s judgment, events concerning usually the end times with symbolism, visions, and bizarre imagery, end-time events or simply future events for the original readers that receive these apocalyptic sayings. So, the phrase “little apocalypse” I think is an okay tagline for Mark chapter 13 because it does bear apocalyptic features. It does speak about future events. However, here is the big question this morning: Is everything said in Mark 13 a reference to still future events? And even more important to that, we have to answer the question: Does anything said in Mark 13 refer to anything that is future for us who are living today? Those are the two big questions. Now, obviously, things that Jesus said in this passage were future for the disciples, the original hearers. It’s obvious that at least some of these events, especially the ones that we’re going to describe at the beginning, it is very clear were events that occurred in the lives of the disciples and the early church because they are tied to the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple, which we’re going to look at here in a moment. But non-biblical history itself says that Jerusalem was destroyed, that the temple was destroyed in AD 70 by the hands of the Romans. So, we understand that, but the question is: Do all the events in Mark 13 refer to things that happened in the first century, or do some of these events describe yet events that the church has not experienced and that won’t experience until what we might call the end of the world? Well, to answer that, we need to make sure that we affirm an important principle of conservative biblical scholarship because liberal scholars have had a field day with this passage.

An important principle of biblical conservative scholarship is the principle of a grammatical, historical approach to interpreting Scripture. The word *grammatical* just means that you interpret a text in light of its original language. For our case, this would be Greek. Historical simply meaning that we interpret Scripture in light of its own historical context; so that the grammatical, historical approach is simply a plain natural reading of Scripture that takes the words at face value and takes into consideration the context in which they were spoken; who spoke them, who they were spoken to. However, we must be careful because while we would say this is a literal way to interpret the Bible, we would not say it’s a literalistic way to interpret the Bible. There are those who interpret Scripture literalistically; and what I mean by that is they say, “There’s really not much room for symbols and metaphors and allegory, or if there is room for it, we have to be very, very careful how we interpret it.” In fact, there have been some heretics who said, “You can’t interpret the Bible any other way but literalistically,” and obviously they hit many, many walls when they say this. For example, Jesus said on one occasion, “*I am the door.*” On another occasion Jesus said, “*I am the shepherd.*” and by that Jesus did not mean literalistically He was a door or He was a shepherd. Metaphorically, He was as shepherd of the people of God, but He wasn’t a physical shepherd that watched over physical sheep. He was a carpenter, and then later He was a preacher.

So, my definition of literally interpreting the Bible simply means we take the original words of the original author and what he meant them to mean to the original people, whether symbolism or metaphors was used or not. To say this—and you’ve probably heard it—a text without a context is nothing more than a pretext. So, we want to interpret Mark 13 within its historical context.

A literal interpretation also, by the way, involves the use of cross references, which is a famous Reformed principle where the Reformers would use Scripture to help interpret Scripture. Scripture, in other words, was its own best commentary on Scripture itself, and since all of the Scriptures are harmoniously united—there are no contradictions; there may be complications, but there are no contradictions—we must believe that the Bible is one, as God is one. And so, we use other passages of Scripture to elucidate and crystalize other passages of Scripture. This is called the “analogy of faith.” It’s a principle of interpretation related to another principle, which says the clear texts must always interpret the unclear texts, and this is specifically relevant when we’re talking about apocalyptic portions of Scripture, or such as the case this morning, Mark 13, which bears apocalyptic features. It is the more clear texts that are to help us understand the less clear apocalyptic texts, and this is what makes Mark 13 extremely difficult to interpret, not just for us but for scholars of all stripes, conservative and liberal because, on the one hand, Jesus does teach in clear, simple language to describe events that most assuredly occurred in the first century, but on the other hand and almost in the same breath, Jesus uses symbolism and metaphors, bizarre imagery. But you struggle with this even in your own life. Outside of biblical interpretation, we run into this sort of thing all the time. People sometimes take what we say literally when we mean it metaphorically. For example, if you’re ever around a teenage boy—and I do have one, and he’s smarter than most, but I also coach teenage boys, and they take everything literally, everything. You have to explain every metaphor. Teenage girls are not that way. They have a more mature mind, and they can understand a metaphor when they hear it. Well, that’s a good illustration because as Christians, particularly with Mark 13, we need to act like adults, not children when it comes to interpreting this passage and any passage that’s highly complex that doesn’t yield universal agreement in interpretation. The Bible says we’ve been given the mind of Christ. The Bible says that part of what this means is through the preaching of the Word, Ephesians 4:11 and following is that the church may be built up to become a mature man; and this involves not just spiritual maturity but theological maturity.

Here is the main interpretive problem of Mark chapter 13. Jesus prophesies the destruction of the temple and the fall of Jerusalem that occurred in AD 70, which was future for the disciples that originally heard it, but then He speaks—notice with me in verse 26—about them seeing “*the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.*” Now, we usually associate that verse with the second coming of Christ, but there’s a problem because when you skip down to verse 30, Jesus says, “*Truly, I say to you.*” That means, listen, this is very important. “*This generation,*” the generation I’m speaking to, Jesus says, “*will not pass away until all these things take place.*” Now, that is a major, major problem. “*All these things,*” *tauta panta* in the Greek, is something that liberal scholars have velcroed themselves to because it appears that Jesus is saying all the events that take place in Mark chapter 13, including His second coming are supposedly to have already occurred. “But Jesus didn’t return,” liberal scholars say. “Jesus didn’t return to consummate His kingdom. Jesus didn’t return to judge the world, and therefore,” liberal scholars say, “Jesus was mistaken. Jesus didn’t know what He was talking about, and if Jesus didn’t know what He was talking about, can you really trust the rest of the New Testament Scriptures, which are the

elongated Words of Christ through the inspired apostles?” Now that’s a big problem. That’s a major problem.

Some conservative scholars have come to our aid and they say that, like Old Testament prophecies in the Old Testament often do, Jesus’ words in Mark 13 have both a near or immediate fulfillment as well as a far or future fulfillment, so that the Son of Man coming in the clouds of glory was a coming in judgment upon national Israel, the apostles being the generation of those that didn’t pass away before they saw it, and the destruction of the temple. And that the far fulfillment has to do with another literal coming of Jesus at the end of the world. In other words, in Old Testament prophecy, there is often a near fulfillment and far fulfillment; and when there is a near fulfillment, it is a paradigm or a template or a picture of a future fulfillment. That is an attractive way to interpret Mark chapter 13.

But it’s very important to note at this point, the Olivet Discourse can only be handled in one of two ways. Number one, you can take Jesus’ language about His coming in clouds of glory figuratively to mean that He came figuratively in AD 70 in which case the timeframe reference, “this generation won’t pass away” would be interpreted literally because that generation that Jesus spoke to literally didn’t pass away, most of them or many of them, until the destruction of the temple. But even in that case, there’s both figurative and literal interpretive techniques used. Or secondly, you can see the timeframe reference figuratively. In other words, when Jesus says this generation’s not going to pass away, He’s not literally speaking about the original generation, but figuratively about a future generation, the one at the end of the world, in which case you have to take the reference to His second coming in clouds of glory literally; He’s coming literally at the end of the time. And coming in the clouds of glory had nothing to do with what happened in the first century. That’s all second century and to be interpreted literally. So, you can see that either way, there’s a figurative interpretation that is utterly inescapable no matter how you interpret Mark chapter 13.

But there’s an easier, I would say, though lesser known, way to understand Mark chapter 13, and I’m going to give it to you. There is an orthodox position known as *preterism*. Now, the word *preterism* comes from the Latin word, *praeter* which simply means “past.” So preterism deals with things that happened in the past. We would not espouse, in fact, we would reject out of hand what is referred to as full preterism. That is a heretical and un-Christian belief that all prophetic portions of Scripture have been fulfilled. That is a very dangerous thing to affirm. But there is something referred to as partial preterism, and partial preterism is orthodox because it says not all of prophetic Scripture has been fulfilled, but much of prophetic Scripture has been fulfilled. For example, the prophecies in Daniel and much of the prophecies if not most of the prophecies in Revelation have already been fulfilled, and that means that the events described in Mark 13 describe events that occurred in the first century AD, particularly the destruction of the temple in AD 70, which means that most of Revelation is not a symbolic picture of what will take place, but a symbolic picture of what has already taken place. And the reason they say this is that Revelation also has timeframe references. Jesus says all these things are going to take place before this generation passes away, right? That’s what he says in verse 30: “*This generation will not pass away until all these things take place.*”

John in the Book of Revelation uses a similar timeframe reference, and John says all “*the things that must soon take place*,” understood in the most plain way to mean that literally, they’re going to take place in the generation that John wrote Revelation. And if you take an early date of Revelation, not to go into any more detail this morning, but if you take an early date of Revelation as being written in the 60s, then what John is saying, he’s speaking about events that occurred in the first century, prior to AD 70, and some events after. But unlike the full preterist position, partial preterism says that we still await certain key prophecies. For example, we await the visible bodily return of Christ. We await the final defeat and death of Satan. We await the resurrection of the living and the dead. We await the new heaven, the new earth, the new Jerusalem, the consummation of God’s kingdom. You remember Paul said in 2 Timothy 2:18 there are some who say the resurrection has already taken place, and Paul says they “*have swerved from the faith*.” They are heretics.

So full preterism is something to be avoided like the plague, but partial preterism is something we must consider to make sense of Mark chapter 13. We know there are still prophetic events to take place. We know Jesus has not returned, and that He will return bodily. We know that the new heavens and new earth is not here yet. We know that the resurrection has not taken place. Paul says there’s still sin, there’s still sorrow, there’s still death. Paul says that all creation is still in bondage, waiting to be freed from corruption and has groans, pangs of childbirth, waiting to be renewed while we await the resurrection of our bodies. So, there are still events to take place, but the question is are the events in Mark 13 events yet to take place or are they events that already occurred?

I say everything that I’ve said at the beginning, knowing that it is a long introduction because I want you to understand that we are flying into turbulence this morning when we look at Mark chapter 13. And in fact, you might be able to say that we’re flying into flack because if we get it wrong, the whole plane of Christianity can come crashing down. And the liberal scholars get it wrong. Full preterists get it wrong, but you still have that bothersome thing that Jesus says in verse 30, that “*This generation will not pass away until all these things take place*.” *Tauta panta*, “*all these things*,” everything, Jesus says in Mark 13. Well, we are going to discover why He said that, and we’re going to discover what He meant by what He said, and as we do so, we’re going to use what I call a literal interpretation of Scripture because what I mean by that is that we’re going to take Jesus’ words at face value. We’re going to be adults, not children, knowing that we may disagree on certain details, but as long as we are within the orthodox framework of what the Bible teaches, we need to learn to live with those that perhaps disagree with us on certain details, and yet at the same time, I would hasten to say that I think by the end of our study of Mark 13, which will take several weeks to go through, you will be able to have a plain, natural reading of the text that will alleviate any questions you have about end times and any questions you may have about this or that theological position.

So, in an effort to make our approach as simple as possible because we’re dealing with a thoroughly complex text, I simply want to make the observation as we study Mark 13 that Jesus makes seven sweeping points. Now listen, this is important, seven sweeping points regarding this simple truth; God’s judgment upon national Israel that proves there has been the dawning of a new age, we could say a new epoch, a new covenant, which by implication and necessity means that an old age, and old epoch, and an old covenant has thoroughly passed away. That’s the simple and most basic

way to explain this text. Jesus says a lot, but I’m going to sum it down to seven sweeping statements, which all relate to the one thing Jesus is saying, and that is that God’s judgment on national Israel was a statement that God was making to show that we live in a new age, a new covenant, and new times, and that has massive ramifications for how we live the Christian life. So, seven sweeping statements. We’re going to try to look at just three this morning.

First of all, I want you to note with me what I want to call the supernatural prediction. The supernatural prediction in verses 1 and 2. Jesus makes His first sweeping statement, but first it’s preceded by a simple observation. I love this. The apostles in verse 1 make a simple observation, and Jesus uses it as a teaching moment. That’s a good reminder to parents. There’s many opportunities to teach our children, and we must capitalize on those opportunities. It’s like Jesus is a Father here. They make a simple observation. That have no clue He’s going to launch into a sermon, which is exactly what He does, but we don’t see the sweeping statement until verse 2. Notice verse 1: *“And as he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!’”* Now, Jesus is heading out of the temple with the disciples, likely through the Golden Gate, which would have been located on the eastern wall, and they would have been headed toward the Mount of Olives. This is very likely Tuesday of the last week of our Lord’s life, probably afternoon, late afternoon, early evening. It wasn’t quite dark yet. Possibly, we don’t know for sure, maybe the last time Jesus was in that temple, and if that’s true, it’s as if He’s shaking the dust off His feet as He walks away. They’re looking at the beauty of the temple, and Jesus is going to make a remark about that, but notice in verse 1, one of his disciples unnamed turned to Jesus as they walked and said, and you can imagine this: *“Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!”*

Now, as I’ve said before, the other gospel accounts give us some fuller details. For example, Matthew says Jesus left the temple and was going away when His disciples came to point out to Him the buildings of the temple. So, Matthew tells us this is really a discussion. All the disciples are pointing out all the buildings they’re talking about, everything that Herod had built that represented Israel, and that’s when one of the disciples said, *“Look, Teacher,”* look at these wonderful buildings, probably because Jesus wasn’t saying anything, probably because Jesus was silent. Now, what they said was true. The temple was considered one of the wonders of the ancient world. This was not Solomon’s temple that was built in the tenth century BC. That temple was destroyed in 587 by the Babylonians. This was Herod’s temple. When Israel returned from 70 years of exile to Israel, they built the second temple, and that temple lasted for a long time, but in 19 BC, not long before Jesus was born, Herod began remodeling the cities. And Herod, one of his prized construction projects was the temple, and he wanted to make it unsurpassed in its beauty, unsurpassed in its size, in its magnificence, and indeed, he did. One historian of antiquity said, *“Herod’s temple looked like a mountain of marble decorated with gold.”* That’s how people described it in their time. In fact, if you turn with me to Luke chapter 21, this is the parallel account of the Olivet Discourse. Luke 21:5: *“And while some were speaking of the temple, how it was adorned with noble stones and offerings,”* that’s when Jesus makes His statement, which in our text is verse 2, but in Luke’s account is verse 6.

So, the disciples are discussing the stones, the beauty of this temple, that they are just overcome by it, and by Jesus’ day, the temple had actually been under remodel for fifty years, and it still wasn’t complete. A remodel for fifty years, still incomplete and yet still beautiful, the size alone

making it marvelous. It sat on thirty-five acres. Its circumference was one mile, and because I only learned how to do math by watching American football, let me put it to you in simple terms. It was three football fields wide by five football fields long. The southeast corner of the retaining wall was fifteen stories above the ground beneath it, the Kidron Valley which sloped down. And the portico which was a porched-in area, Josephus says, and I quote: “Was a striking spectacle.” That is where Jesus had had the debates with the religious leaders. It measured forty-five feet wide, consisting of three aisles with steps supported by four rows of columns that were all crowned with Corinthian caps, forty feet tall supporting a cedar-paneled ornate ceiling. And those columns, folks, were so large that it took three big men encompassing one by touching their fingertips together, and that was without even discussing the sanctuary, which was 150 feet high, the same as the temple wall surrounding the temple. So that we learn from history that some of the stones were sixty feet in length, eleven feet high and eight feet thick, weighing a million pounds. And that can’t be far off base because some of the stones have been discovered forty-two feet long, fourteen feet wide, and eleven feet high, weighting 600 tons. Other stones forty feet long, twenty-five feet long.

So, the temple was marvelous to look at. At verse 1 says, “*Wonderful,*” so wonderful that one rabbi said this, and I quote: “He who was not seen the temple has not seen a glorious building in his entire life.” That’s how significant this temple was. And its beauty and its marvel wasn’t just because of its size. It had vast porticos and colonnades and patios and courtyards, but here’s how the sanctuary was described by an onlooker. This onlooker said that the sanctuary was shaped like a lion, broader in the front, fifty meters, narrower in the back, thirty meters. It rose to a height of fifty meters and was a visual collage of gold and silver and crimson and purple, radiating the rising sun like a snowclad mountain. I mean, words just couldn’t describe it. And Jesus and His disciples had been on the inside of this temple, but now they’re looking on the outside of it. And what did it look like from the outside? Well, Josephus tells us, and I quote: “The exterior wanted of nothing that could astound either the mind or the eye, for being covered on all sides with massive plates of gold, the sun was no sooner up than it radiated so fiery a flash that persons straining could look at it, and they were compelled to advert their eyes when they did as from the solar rays. To approaching strangers, it appeared from a distance like a snowclad mountain.” There’s that phrase again. “For all that was not overlaid with gold was of purest white. Some of the stones in the building were forty-five cubits in length, five cubits in height, and six in breadth.”

But you do realize we’ve only gotten to verse 1 so far. That little comment that the disciple made prompts Jesus—listen to this—to make one of the most radical, unbelievable, misunderstood, and controversial statements that He ever made. Notice it with me in verse 2: “*And Jesus said to him, ‘Do you see these great buildings?’*” In other words, they said to Him, “Do you see these buildings? Aren’t you looking? Don’t you have anything to say?” And Jesus says, “*Do you see these great buildings,*” the ones you were pointing at?” “*There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.*” Wow. Now, it’s not that Jesus disagreed with the beauty of the temple. It’s not as if He didn’t think it was beautiful. Everyone did. It’s not as if He wasn’t participating in discussing how wonderful it was because it wasn’t wonderful from an exterior perspective—it certainly was. The comment, “This is a wonderful building” was not out of place, but the perspective was. And you see Jesus wants to show them, in verse 2, with his supernatural prediction of the destruction of the temple, He wants the disciples to see beyond the exterior construction of beauty to the interior corruption of its ugliness. He wants them to see beyond the present to the future. He wants them to see God’s perspective, which is the right perspective, and

God’s perspective is going to be made in a historical statement. He is going to destroy that beautiful temple.

Jesus wants them to see beyond the material substance of the temple to the spiritual symbolism that had been perverted by the people of Israel. So, Jesus is doing nothing here but making a supernatural prediction of what He has indirectly hinted at all along during His ministry, and especially of late as He’s entered Jerusalem. You see, the temple had been the place where Jesus’ activity had taken place. It’s where all the debates took place. Jesus had cleansed the temple. The temple had reversed God’s purpose for her, and God was calling her to reverse it back through repentance, because the temple represented them. What did it represent? The temple was a representative or a monument of rebellion and hypocrisy against God. Behind it’s beautiful walls, gold-plated as they were, pure white was inward corruption. What did we find early in Mark’s Gospel? Extortion, religious trafficking, prostitution of the Word. The temple itself was not the problem; it’s just a material object. But it symbolized the outer façade of the people whose inward hearts were absolutely filthy, and that’s really what Jesus is getting at when He predicts the destruction of the temple. It represented the people. You remember what Jesus said. We quoted it last week. Jesus says, *“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it!” How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!*” So, Jesus says, *“Your house is left to you desolate.”* What was Jesus referring to? The house of worship, the temple, saying that it was going to be left desolate. Jesus had already really spoken about this, and the reason Jesus spoke about it was because of hypocrisy. Matthew 23:27 says, *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful,”* just like the temple, *“but within are full of dead people’s bones and all uncleanness.”*

I mean, the beautiful stone building blocks of the temple had become ugly stumbling blocks where the people were actually stumbling into hell because of the teaching of the religious leaders. *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!”* Jesus would say. *“For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people’s faces.”* So, in other words, you opened the temple to them, but by opening the temple to them, you’re actually shutting heaven to them.

“You shut the kingdom of heaven in their faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in.” “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves.”

Those are strong words. And you see, Jesus’ actions not just His words also spoke aloud. What did He do? He cleansed the temple. He chased out the moneychangers, righteous indignation, zeal for God’s house—the disciples remember the quotation from the Old Testament—consumed our Lord. And what did He do as well on that same day? Well, He cursed the fig tree because that fig tree represented the family tree of God, the old covenant people, and Jesus curses that tree. He curses the people of God. He cleansed the temple. He cursed the fig tree because from top to bottom, folks, Israel was marked by religious hypocrisy. They would reject their Savior. They would reject the salvation promised to them, and the religious leaders were culpable; how they acted, what they taught, the type of people they produced. And we saw what kind of people they produced earlier in Mark chapter 12. They produced people like the scribes who liked greetings in

the marketplaces and walking around in long robes. They produced people who liked the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at feasts. I mean, they produced men and women who had a spiritual façade of religion but no depth of spirituality. They weren't true believers. They were whitewashed tombs. And they also produced people like the victimized, terrorized, and deceived poor widow whose house was devoured, and she gave all of her money to the temple. So, this is serious stuff, but to the disciples this would have been a shock. “You're telling me this temple that we know, that we love, that our ancestors generation after generation after generation after generation have to come to to worship God, is going to be destroyed?” Jesus says, “That's the prediction.”

Now, at this point, nothing Jesus has said in Mark chapter 13 has been symbolic language, has it? Nothing. The destruction of the temple, the fall of Jerusalem, which He predicts here supernaturally was a literal fulfillment in AD 70. Jesus' actions were symbolic when He cleansed the temple, but Jesus literally means the temple will be destroyed in verse 2. And of course, we read in history after the Jewish rebellion against Rome in AD 66, Jerusalem was taken by Roman general Titus, son of emperor of Vespasian. The temple was destroyed, and more than a million Jews who had crowded into the city as it was laid to siege were killed. And Israel at that point—forget biblical history—regular normal history, at that point Israel ceased to exist politically. Josephus writes, and I quote: “Caesar ordered the whole city and the temple to be razed to the ground,” R-A-Z-E-D, leveled. And all the rest of the wall encompassing the city was so completely leveled to the ground as to leave future visitors to the spot no ground for believing that Jerusalem had even been inhabited. It was so destroyed. As Jesus says there, “*There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.*” And Rome was the human instrument of divine wrath, as Roman soldiers lit fires that caused the stones of the temple to crumble under heat, and then the Roman legions built redoubts and catapulted heavy stones and ammunition, missiles lit with fire as it was under siege. It was a horrific, absolutely horrific event, perhaps the most horrific event in warfare history. And under the cover of artillery fire, the soldiers could then bash, beginning with the northern wall, with their battering rams all of those stones, so that by AD 70, likely April, sometime in the spring, the walls were breached. The city was ransacked. The soldiers would split those rocks in two to take the gold for themselves, the remaining stones thrown into the Kidron Valley so that only the footings of the foundation wall remained. And even today, the only portion of the temple that's there is the western wall. It's known as the Wailing Wall.

But notice Jesus' words, “*There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.*” Some people say, “Well, that didn't literally happen because there were some stones that were still up.” Well, yeah, I mean I guess Jesus could have said 92.6854% of the stones are going to come apart. It wouldn't have had the same impact. His point is to use hyperbole because hyperbole is what the Old Testament prophets used to describe 92%+ of this temple is going to be so destroyed that it's going to be as if nothing is left. Just like in Florida when a hurricane comes through a town and someone is interviewed on the news and the person says, “I came home and there was nothing left.” Well, the walls were still left, and we wouldn't accuse them of saying that they're lying. Jesus is purposely using hyperbole—get this—because Jeremiah 9:11, the destruction of the temple by the Babylonians, Jeremiah said, “*I will make Jerusalem a heap of ruins.*” Hyperbole. Or Haggai 2:15, it tells us that one stone was placed upon another stone to build the temple, and it's as if Jesus is saying here, “One stone on top of another stone will be removed.” It will be taken apart. Jeremiah 26:6: “*I will make this city a curse for all the nations of*

the earth,” and that’s what happened in Old Testament Israel. Babylon made that city a curse by the hand of God. God had ordained it.

You see, this is massively important. The temple was built for permanence. When you saw the temple, you thought “permanence,” generation after generation after generation. But Jesus is saying here in verse 2 by supernatural prediction that it’s going to be marked by absence. There’s not going to be anything there. I mean, this would be like someone telling you that tomorrow the United States is going to cease to exist. It’s going to be wiped off the map of the world. It’s hard for you to imagine the world without the United States, obviously because you’re a citizen of the United States, but even for the rest of the world to imagine a world without the United States would be frightening. A world without the temple, yeah, that’s what Jesus is predicting because the temple was meant to symbolize true worship, right? The temple was meant to symbolize protection. The temple was meant to symbolize fellowship with God. The temple was meant to symbolize salvation, but instead, they perverted the purpose of the temple. It didn’t symbolize protection but vulnerability. It would be left desolate. It didn’t symbolize fellowship with God but fellowship with Satan. Jesus told the religious leaders, *“You are of your father the devil,”* John 8:44. It didn’t symbolize salvation; it symbolized damnation, total destruction at God’s sovereign hand by their chief enemies, their archrivals, the Romans, just as He did by Israel’s archrivals in the Old Testament, the Babylonians. Why? Because the temple was hijacked by the religious leaders, and that’s why Jesus called it in Mark 11:17, *“a den of robbers.”* And so, now God would have the Romans ransack and loot them, robbing them of their precious temple treasury and robbing them of their beautiful temple.

That is a massive, massive event in human history, but I want you to hang with me because Jesus makes seven sweeping points in this passage. We’ve only seen one, the supernatural prediction. Remember, the main point that He’s making is that with God’s judgment on national Israel, there’s going to be the dawning of a new age, a new covenant, a new epoch, which means the end of an old age, old covenant, and old epoch. So, we move from the supernatural prediction, verses 1 and 2, to the fearful anticipation, verse 3 through 5. And again, Jesus makes a statement of importance in light of the fearful anticipation of the disciples. We don’t see His statement until verse 5. Again, He’s responding to more questions. Notice in verse 3: *“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?’”* You can understand, right, their fearful anticipation? I mean, they’ve had time to walk from the temple all the way to the Mount of Olives. They’ve gotten comfortable. Jesus has sat down. They can see the temple. They’re three hundred feet on the Mount of Olives above Jerusalem. They can see the temple buildings. Jesus has sat down, assuming the position of an authoritative teacher, and so they approach Him to ask Him—here’s the authority, “We need to know the signs of the times. When is this going to occur?” This question comes by Peter, Andrew, James and John. The inner circle, Peter, James and John, you notice at the transfiguration. Andrew wasn’t a part of that, but Andrew was Peter’s brother and Andrew was very instrumental in bringing the disciples to Christ. He was one of the first converts, if not the first convert. And so, verse 3 says they asked Jesus privately. “This is massive stuff. We’ve got to understand this.” Verse 4: *“Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?”* I mean, they looked out from the Mount of Olives over at Jerusalem and they could not believe that it would be destroyed. How could it? When could it? Why?

So, they asked questions concerning the timing of this cataclysmic historical event of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. *“When will these things be,”* verse 4, *“and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?”* They sound a lot like people in our own day, don’t they? “Okay, God, we believe your Word. We understand destruction and judgment is coming, but could you give us a hint when that might happen so that we can be prepared?” That’s the idea. In other words, they are assuming—listen to this—that with the destruction of the temple and the end of the temple, that it meant the end of the world. And we know that because Mark is brief but Matthew’s not. Turn back with me to Matthew 24. Notice the fuller question. There’s another element. When will these things be accomplished? What is the sign? But there’s another element. Matthew 24:3: *“As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, ‘Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming?’”* Okay, so far same as Mark, but then they add: *“and of the end of the age?”* In other words, in their Jewish way of thinking, the Messiah came once, and when He came, He destroyed Israel’s enemies, which meant the end of the world, the consummation of the kingdom, and His literal rule on the earth in the temple. But here, they’re fearful because Jesus has said the Messiah is not going to come and topple their enemies, but instead, their enemies are going to topple them, and so they’re fearful. “Why is our temple being destroyed? Because when the end of the age comes, we know that the Messiah is going to defeat all of our enemies, and so if the temple is going to be destroyed, if that’s going to happen, that must mean someone has done this and the Messiah’s going to come and set him straight. They’ve destroyed our beautiful temple.” That was their mindset. I mean, they had grown up as children quoting and singing the Psalms, Psalms that spoke about the second temple, the beauty of the second temple, the place of worship:

*Great is the LORD and greatly to be praised
in the city of our God!
His holy mountain, beautiful in elevation,
is the joy of all the earth,
Mount Zion, in the far north,
the city of the great King.
Within her citadels God
has made himself known as a fortress.*

*Walk about Zion, go around her,
number her towers,
consider well her ramparts,
go through her citadels,
that you may tell the next generation
that this is God,
our God forever and ever.
He will guide us forever.*

I mean, that was Psalm 48, and now Jesus is saying, “No, the Messiah’s not going to come and topple your enemies. God is going to come and topple you.” By the way, they’re on the Mount of Olives. If you remember in the Old Testament in Ezekiel, that’s where the *shekinah* glory of God departed when the temple was destroyed, and in Zechariah chapter 14, it’s the very place that

predicts the Son of Man coming again. So, they are confused, fearfully anticipating what is going to happen, but remember, we also have a little bit of anxiety in studying this passage, because what does verse 30 say? Go back to it again. *“Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.”* Did Jesus literally return in AD 70? Because Jesus said in verse 26, *“[You are going to] see the Son of Man coming in [the] clouds with great power and glory.”* Jesus says, *“all these things, all these things”* will take place before this generation passes away. How are we to take this? Well, if you’re a liberal scholar you’ll say, “Jesus thought the Son of Man returned. Jesus thought that this was going to be the consummated kingdom, and it wasn’t. So, Jesus is mistaken. You can’t trust Him, and you can’t really trust the rest of your New Testament Scriptures.”

I doubt any of us here this morning would lean that way, so what does this mean? Well, notice Jesus’ response to the fearful anticipation of the disciples’ questions about these signs in verse 5. Notice your Bibles: *“And Jesus began to say to them, ‘See that no one leads you astray.’”* In other words, “You have your eschatology wrong. You don’t understand. You don’t understand the identity of the Messiah, the purpose of the Messiah, the timing of these events. You need to be taught lest you be deceived, lest you be led astray.” That’s what Jesus is saying, and what a practical point for us today. We need to be taught too about end-time things, right, lest we be led astray. We need to understand why Jesus came in the world, what He is doing, what He is doing now, when He is coming again. God, help us understand this passage. It’s critical.

Well, that takes us to the third sweeping point. So far, our Lord has provided a supernatural prediction, a prophecy literally fulfilled in AD 70. He has responded to a fearful anticipation by the disciples by giving an answer with a word of reassurance, “Look, it’s okay.” *“See that no one leads you astray.”* In other words, I’m going to teach you. I’m going to make you straight. You should be fearfully anticipative of what’s going to happen, but I can help you understand what this means.” So, we moved from the supernatural prediction, the fearful anticipation now to the critical explanation, verse 6 through 8. Jesus continues His thought from verse 5 in verse 6 and He says, *“Many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am he!’ and they will lead many astray.”* Jesus said in verse 5, “I don’t want you to be led astray, so just know this. One of the first signs that these things are going to happen, the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, one of the first signs you’ll see is false messiahs coming, saying, *“I am he!”* False appearances of false Christs. This occurred in the first century. Josephus even identifies particular people that claimed to be Christ before the destruction of the temple, but there’s more signs. Verse 7, Jesus says, *“And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed.”* There were rumors of wars. In fact, one rumor circulated in AD 40 during emperor Caligula’s reign because he had put up a statue or image of himself in the sacred precincts of the temple, and the Jews were irate. I mean, this is the emperor saying, “Worship me,” right? And the Jews wanted to revolt, and they talked about it, and you had the zealots, and you had the Romans saying, “What are we going to do? We’re going to go to war,” but it was just a rumor of war. There was no war in AD 40, but there was a war in AD 66. We’ve mentioned it before. The Jews finally revolted against the Romans, and the Romans crushed them.

But Jesus says to the disciples, “You are not to be alarmed by this when it happens.” And notice He says at the end of verse 7: *“This must take place, but the end is not yet,”* a very critical statement. They thought the end of the world was coming with the end of the temple. Jesus says, “What I’m telling you here in this discourse does not concern the end of the world. Let’s get that

straight. The end is not yet.” These are events, future for the disciples but past for us. We’re on the other side looking back. The end is not yet. In other words, up to this point, the signs deal with their future, but they deal with our past. These are not signs of the end times. These are signs of that period right before the temple was destroyed, and Jesus provides signs because the disciples asked, and He provides signs because He wants them to be safe from that destruction. That comes up later in this passage. The elect people of God are saved. They’re not inside the temple; they’re outside the temple when it’s destroyed. But then verse 8 mentions this: *“For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.”*

You have many people saying, “Well, the world’s going to come to an end because there’s wars, rumors of wars, nations rising against nations, kingdoms against kingdoms.” There have been three hundred wars in Europe in just the last three hundred years. That’s a pretty strong average. The Russians thought during the Napoleonic wars that the end of the world was coming. Believers in Germany thought the end of the world was coming in the 1940s. In the last 3,421 years of recorded history, only 268 of those years that we know of existed without war. Much of what Jesus is saying here is stuff that happens all the time. So, when we look in our own day—wars, rumors of wars, nations rising against nations, kingdom against kingdom—we aren’t to automatically think it’s the end of the world. What we are to think is Jesus said these are signs for what would happen just prior to the destruction of the temple. Additionally, he says in verse 8: *“There will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines.”* Really? Well, in AD 61 in Phrygia, in AD 63 in Pompeii, and during that same period in Laodicea—you’re familiar with that; it’s one of the churches John wrote to—there were earthquakes. Between AD 41 and AD 54 during the reign of Claudius, famines prevailed in the Near East. In fact, there was even a famine in Rome. Can you believe that? The wealthiest place of all had a famine. They weren’t immune to a natural disaster regarding God’s judgment. So, earthquakes, famines Jesus says are also signs of the destruction of the temple in AD 70.

But again, Jesus does not mean that He would return on clouds of glory, bodily and physically, during the disciples’ generation in AD 70. So, what do we do with Him returning on the clouds of power and glory before that generation passed away? What do we do with that? The key to the whole passage, and certainly to the message this morning is the end of verse 8. Jesus says, *“These are but the beginning of the birth pains.”* Remember, He said at the end of verse 7: *“This must take place, but the end is not yet.”* And now He says, *“These are but the beginning of the birth pains.”* What does Hebrews 1 say? *“God spoke to our fathers by the prophets,”* in various ways, *“but in these”* what? *“last days he has spoken to us.”* There has been no end to date-setters predicting the end of the world. I remember lying in my bed prior to 2000. I was a senior in high school, and I lay there thinking, “If the world comes to an end, I won’t even have a graduation diploma from high school.” Such false teaching, even Jesus’ own disciples were not immune to because He warned them in verse 6, and He warns them again in verse 22, *“False christs and false prophets will arise and perform signs and wonders, to lead astray, if possible, [even] the elect. But be on guard; I have told you [all] these things before hand.”* “Don’t be deceived.”

So, Jesus points out something critical here. Wars, natural disasters, doomsday prophets insist are signs the end of the world is just around the corner. How many books can be written? How much money can be made? And yet, Jesus points out the exact opposite. The end of verse 8: *“These are but the beginning of the birth pains.”* “So, when you see these signs,” Jesus says to the disciples,

that generation He’s speaking in that historical context, plain, natural reading of the text. He’s saying, “This isn’t the end of the world. I’m not talking about the end of the world. I’m talking about the beginning of birth pains concerning God’s judgment on Israel.” That is an apt illustration, by the way. I’ve never been pregnant, obviously. Never had labor pains, but I know this from having five kids, labor pains are an indication that birth is going to take place. But no woman knows the length of her labor pains, and I would make some women jealous this morning if I told you Corie’s labor pains all added up were less than 15 minutes? Is that true? Oh, I was a little bit off, but I was close. The labor pains weren’t as bad for some women as they are for others. They indicate that childbirth has begun, but the time and the day of the birth nobody knows. And for a woman in labor pains, it seems like an eternity. Time stands still.

So, the tribulation of pain that Israel went through in AD 70 was just the beginning of the birth pains, and what did it spawn? What did it birth? Well, God, using the Romans as an instrument in His hands was making a statement. He was saying this: “The old covenant has ended. I am done working with ethnic Israel as a specific national people because Christ has come. They’ve rejected Him. I’m going to call the gentiles to Myself, and the end of the world will not come until the church is fully mature in Christ. This is only the beginning of the birth pains. This is not the end of time.” In fact, just to give you maybe just a little peek at this, Luke 21, again, Luke 21:9: “*And when you hear of wars and tumults,*” this is the Olivet Discourse according to Dr. Luke, “*do not be terrified, for these things must first take place, but the end will not be at once.*” In other words, there is a gradualism to the doing away of the kingdom of Israel and the spawning of a new covenant, a new epoch, a new era, the new covenant. There is a gradualism to the growth of the kingdom before the end comes. So, what Jesus is speaking about are signs of the times for the apostles, I think. Not signs of the times for our day. Peter would speak about this.

This is now the second letter that I am writing to you,” he said. “In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles, knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. They will say, “Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.

The Bible says those are scoffers, not believers.

For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly

bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

And we still wait “*for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells,*” but while that happens, righteousness is being perpetuated throughout the world because remember, God cursed the fig tree, Israel. But Paul speaks in Romans 11 about the olive tree. What happens with the olive tree? Well, the natural branches are broken off. Israel is broken off. Wild olive branches, gentile believers are grafted in so that the tree is not done away with, but Israel’s punishment, Israel’s tribulation is her excommunication from being the people of God. They are no longer the people of God. That was the past. The destruction of the temple is a doing away of them. They’ve been cut off, and when was that tree pruned? It was pruned in AD 70 when the temple was destroyed. It was God’s statement of excommunication to ethnic Israel. Now, Romans 11 is clear that once the fullness of the gentiles comes in, God will go back to national ethnic Israel. I believe and I think there will be a revival of ethnic Jews, but right now, there’s not much activity. There’s not many Jews coming to a saving knowledge of Christ. And why is that? Well, because the Israel of the new covenant is part of the righteous branch; that is, Jesus. You must believe in Jesus to be part of the true Israel of God. Old covenant Israel was corrupt. Abraham’s our father only spiritually-speaking. What does Jesus say in our text in verse 24?

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 the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.”

In verse 28:

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, at the very gates. Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.

In other words, the tree is being pruned, and as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out leaves, gentile believers are beginning to believe and be welcomed in as the people of God. When you see that happen under the ministry of the apostles, know that the end is near, the end of the temple, the destruction of the temple. God’s statement: “*the Son of Man coming in clouds*” of glory, figuratively in the destruction of the temple to say that gentiles are welcome in my house, part of my people, part of the new covenant. And this has happened with gospel expansion and continues to happen. That tree continues to grow.

So, back in Matthew 24:3 when the disciples ask, “Is this the end of the age, does this mean the end of the world?” and when commentators today say, “Mark 13 is describing the signs and events that will occur before the end of the world,” just know this—I think they’re wrong because Scripture also uses that phrase “*end of the age*” to refer to an epoch of history, the end of the age of the Jews, the beginning of the age of the gentiles. I really think Luke 21:24 is key. This is the Olivet Discourse. “*They will fall by the edge of the sword,*” the Jews will, “*and be led captive among all nations,*” that’s happened. It’s not going to happen, it’s already happened. And notice this, Luke 21:24: “*Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, until the times of the*

Gentiles are fulfilled.” That’s Romans 11:25. God is in the business of saving the world, not just ethnic Jews, and in fact, He judged ethnic Israel by destroying the temple and destroying Jerusalem because they weren’t a good witness for God. So, now you have a largely gentile church, and that’s why you have the statements by Christ so many times over, *“the time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand,”* or when He told the disciples when this happens, you’ll know *“the kingdom of God has come upon you,”* Matthew 12. The kingdom is present. We’re not looking for some future literal reign of a thousand years. The kingdom is now, but what is yet to come is the second return of Christ where He will defeat Satan fully and finally. He will judge unrepentant sinners. He will embrace true believers. He will resurrect them to life. He will resurrect the unjust to eternal fire. He will consummate His kingdom. There will be new heavens, a new earth, a new Jerusalem, and we’ll live happily ever after. We’re awaiting all of that.

But Mark 13 I don’t think is about the signs of the times of the end of the world. It’s about the signs of the times of the end of an age, the end of an epoch, the end of God working with the Jews now until the fullness of gentiles is brought in. That’s why Paul can speak in 1 Corinthians chapter 10 about the ends of the ages. Turn with me to 1 Corinthians chapter 10 just for a moment. Paul uses Israel as an example. He says in verse 1, *“For I do not want you to be unaware...our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses.”* They *“ate spiritual food,”* verse 3. They drank *“spiritual drink,”* verse 4. *“They drank from the spiritual Rock,”* which was Christ. Verse 5: *“Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.”* Verse 6, all these things take place for *“examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did.”* And then he goes on, and he says in verse 9, *“[They] put Christ to the test, [they] were destroyed by serpents.”* They grumbled. Verse 11: *“Now these things happened to them.”* Why? Why did these things happen to ethnic Israel? This is Paul’s words. He’s a Jew, by the way. *“These things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come.”* Paul understood Mark 13 to be something that was fulfilled in the first century; God’s judgment on ethnic Jews to whom the end of the ages has come, the end of an epoch, the end of a covenant, the end of an era.

Now, what we’ve discussed this morning is complex and overwhelming, so I need to say this; in the historical creeds of the church, there is not a verifiable eschatological system that you have to hold to. So, in other words, the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Chalcedon—take any creed. The church fathers don’t say, “We believe you have to be premillennial. We believe you have to be amillennial. We believe you have to be postmillennial.” That’s not because the fathers of these creeds didn’t have eschatological views, but it was because they didn’t believe that a certain eschatological view was necessary to be considered orthodox—unless you’re a full preterist. And if you’re a full preterist, you go against the creeds and confessions because the Apostles’ Creed says, “I believe Jesus Christ will come and judge the quick and the dead.” He’s not returned a second time yet. Mark 13 isn’t about His second coming; it’s about a figurative coming in judgment. He will come again. He will renew this earth, but until then, His kingdom is growing, and the gospel is reaching the nations.

So, that rather than looking for signs of the times of the end of the world, we ought to be working to invest in the kingdom to proclaim the gospel to help build the kingdom, knowing Jesus is building the church, and to optimistically say, “I don’t know when the Lord’s going to return. It could be a thousand years from now, and I’m okay with that because I can glorify God where I’m

at, where He’s put me. With all that He’s given me to do, I can do in His name for His glory because I know that He’s already won. I am part of His covenant. I am part of His kingdom. I’m part of His world, and together with the Holy Spirit and God the Father, I’m one. I’m one with God, and someday, if He doesn’t return in my lifetime, someday I’ll be resurrected, and even if I die and go to heaven, I’ll be with Him. So, I’m not going to worry about Y2K. I’m not going to worry about COVID. I’m not going to worry about doomsday predictions. I’m not going to be a prepper. I’m going to trust God. I’m going to trust God and emphasize what’s important, live for Him, live for His glory because I know this; when the church is unfaithful to Him, He is not beyond bringing natural disasters, wars, and rumors of wars, and all sorts of levels of judgment. If He did it to His people, Israel, He can certainly judge the church through a virus or through what people think is a virus to weaken the faith of the church, which is really God’s motive to strengthen the faith of the church as the world tries to make it weak. So, we stand in boldness. We stand in truth, and I believe that although this might not be the standard way of the way you normally think, this is a legitimate, natural, plain reading and interpretation of Mark chapter 13. But beginning next week, your eyes will really be opened when we begin to look at verse number 9. Until then, let’s pray for God’s grace.

Lord, we thank You for the Scriptures. We thank You just for the blessed opportunity to study them, to consider them, Lord, a text that’s very difficult to understand, one in which there has to be a degree of humility in saying there’s not universal agreement as to how to interpret it, and yet there seems to be simple, straight-forward, plain language which more than suggests that Your judgment of Israel was a sign of the birth of the new covenant. Those pains of childbirth spawned and produced the church worldwide, not just Your people in Israel. This is a blessing. This is a glorious thing to be part of Your people, to be part of the true Israel of God, to lay claim to Father Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, to know that You will fulfill Your promises to Your people and that we are agents and instruments in Your hand to impact the world with the gospel. That is overwhelming. We are Your people, people of Your pasture. Help us to be faithful to You in everything we do, and especially as we continue to study Mark chapter 13 and the Olivet Discourse. We pray all of this in Jesus’ name. Amen.