

The End of the Old: Part 3
Mark: The Gospel of the Kingdom
Mark 13:32-37
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We come this morning to the final portion of Mark Chapter 13, as we've been looking together at Jesus's prophesy of the coming of the end of that generation and what would take place in the city of Jerusalem, which he predicted. But Jesus was also preparing to go to the cross, in which he came and the name which he was given, that he would be a Messiah, the Savior of his people, to save them from their sins. And so he was coming to die upon the cross for sin and then to be raised on the third day, victorious and vindicated. Vindicated, because Jesus is who he says he is. And he was raised on that third day.

But prior to going to the cross, he's leaving his disciples instruction. And this instruction has been understood in various ways, as we looked at last week. Without going back over that, it is the humble belief on my part, and seeking to lead us in this passage, that what Jesus was referring to was not his second coming, but the coming destruction which would happen in 70 A D. upon Jerusalem and the temple.

Now having said that, it isn't to say that it is not instructive and helping us to understand, or at least ask the question, well, then, how do we think about the second coming of Jesus? Are there things that we can learn from this passage? And where ought we to turn when we ask questions of well, if this is not about the second coming, then what is? So we're going to be going through that a little bit this morning as we look at "The End of the Old, Part 3." Verses 32-37. Hear now God's word.

³² "But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³ Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. ³⁴ It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. ³⁵ Therefore stay awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning— ³⁶ lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. ³⁷ And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake." [ESV]

This is the word of the Lord. (Thanks be to God.) Let's pray again. Now, Heavenly Father, we pray that you would open our hearts, our imagination, by the power of your Holy Spirit through the truth of your word, that we might gain a greater understanding of who Jesus is as our Messiah, as our Savior, and what our hope is. We pray you would do this. Help the teacher. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Perhaps you have seen and also enjoyed, as I have, the videos of people, gathered from various cameras or cell phones, watching others who are walking down a sidewalk or in the middle of a mall or somewhere while trying to watch a small screen not paying attention. Falling into fountains, running into others, causing accidents. And we look at it, then we chuckle. We find it a very human experience. We also find it to be far too true of even ourselves. We are the generation that are entertained to death. We have more opportunities for entertainment than

any other generation. It's always present.

But beyond entertainment—even if you're not using your phones to entertain yourself—we're still looking at them. We're like Pavlovian dogs checking our devices. I'm not going to do this, but I'm going to guess that there are far fewer of you wearing watches than were wearing watches twenty years ago. These devices have replaced our watches. Now our watches have become more like our phones. This is not condemnatory. That's not my point. My point is to say to a generation that is distracted, if there's ever a set of verses that is at least still applicable to us, it is certainly these. Staying awake doesn't mean literally: “Don't fall asleep.” It's saying to a distracted generation, “Pay attention to what's going on around you. Stay awake.”

And it's so hard to do. Even if you don't use your phone in your car, our cars are becoming like our phones. On average, when we're playing with our devices or playing with our cars, in some way, shape, or form we take our eyes away anywhere from fifteen to thirty seconds. When we're at home, how many of you have experienced—I'm not going to ask you to raise your hands, but how many of you have experienced—you've looked around the room and you've realized that not only you, but the rest of your family are all present in the same zip code, in the same breathing space, but you're actually not in the same space. You're on your various devices. Some of you now are looking at your devices. Going ‘How long will this last...’

Now we like to think of ourselves as progressive, beyond. That was then, this is now. But you know the problem isn't this. Because if it wasn't this, we would find something else to distract us. The same was the case in this first century when Jesus looked at them and he says: *Warning. Pay attention.* So in this first point you'll see he says he gives us a **Wise Warning**. He talks about time and he talks about the real enemy, time. What do I mean. He says literally, “But concerning that day and that hour, no one knows, not even angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”

Whether you understand these verses as referring, as I do, to the prophecy which would befall Jerusalem, or you do see this as Jesus's second coming, it is yet again the instruction of something that the Church of Jesus Christ needs to put to bed. Are you ready? We need to start working with numbers. We need to stop saying that this is the end times. Because guess what, Paul did, too. So did John, so did Peter. We don't know. They didn't know then, and we don't know now. And even the way we think about the word ‘end times’ is such a relatively recent thing to appear on the church's radar. Scholars use the word *parousia*, the coming. And generally when we think about it in a North American context, we think about Jesus's coming with an apocalyptic sort of end, cataclysmic end. And so over and over again, whether it's been the Left Behind series or all the myriad other ways in which it's captured our imagination—what will it be, when will it be, how can we figure it out—Jesus has told the Church of Jesus Christ: We don't know.

Which should be a cue to us knowing the time isn't the point. Knowing the who is. Jesus says if the Son doesn't know and the Father does, and the angels in heaven do not know, then what is it that we ought to be aware of? And he says—what I call the real enemy—Be on guard. Keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. And then he uses different ways of talking about it. In essence, he's saying to his disciples hey, listen, I've left you in charge. Stay awake. Verse 35: “Therefore stay awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning—lest he

come suddenly and find you asleep.” It's very clear that because we don't know the time, it makes it even more important because of who it is. He is saying I am the Lord. He is the king. And when he comes, we don't know, and it could be in the middle of the night. And as the Scriptures say, it could be like a thief. Boy, if we could predict that, we wouldn't need alarm systems. We can no more predict that than we can someone who will try to rob us.

But he says the real enemy, which is underneath this whole admonition, this charge, this ‘Be on guard. Keep awake.’ Here is the real enemy. Apathy. That when time goes by we tend to grow apathetic. Maybe it's not going to happen. We fill our thoughts, we fill our purposes, we fill our goals with what we want to do, and spiritually we say, mmm, it wasn't today. And so we begin to build our own worlds in an egocentric fashion, as if, well, not today and probably not tomorrow, either.

Spiritual apathy is one of the greatest poisons for the Christian. That because we don't know when he's going to come back, or it hasn't happened in a long time, we just get tired. And so when we get tired, we get lazy. And when we get lazy, we become slothful. And when we become slothful, we allow all kinds of things into the doorsteps of our hearts and our minds, and we fill it. And when it becomes filled, what begins to happen is we begin to rust from the inside out. And we allow all kinds of temptations and sins into our lives, that for the time do not seem wrong. But slowly, but surely, what begins to happen is we go well, did the Lord really say? I mean, I'm just a broken sinner. I mean, he'll forgive me, right? He's a God of grace.

Yes, he is a God of grace. And if you are in Christ, there is nothing that can steal you from his hands. Please hear me when I say that there is nothing that can steal you from his hands. But spiritual apathy is not a pleasure to the Lord. And he will allow—because of his loving discipline—he will allow challenge and trial and difficulty to be the consequence of our actions. It's not punitive, it's discipline.

Let me give it to you in this way. Yesterday Caroline and I were getting some driving time in. And we were doing some errands, and one of those was going to the library to drop off a book which I got two late reminders for. So I'm going to the library. Caroline gets salad. But as we were pulling up to get out and put it in the book slot, a young boy—I would say about the age of two or three—is running headlong towards the parking lot. I am driving up. I see the child. I come to a stop. The father is not watching me at that moment, so he doesn't know what I'm doing. He just knows he sees his son running. And so that father, laden down with book bags and everything else—demonstrating more dexterity and ability, probably, than he has in a long time—runs towards the child right as it reaches the curb. And he grabs his son by the shoulders. And boy, as he did, you could tell that was a grip of life. Right. And when he did, the look on his son's face was, like, immediate horror. But not of like... He knew exactly who had him, but he was like, crying, because *‘You didn't let me do what I wanted to do.’*

I mean, it was right there. Caroline and I had front row seats. And I looked at her and I said, Did you see that? God bless Caroline, because she's got a father who is a pastor. Now that's what divine discipline looks like, right there. I know you're in Children's Church tomorrow, you're not going to hear me say that. I'm just telling you that is divine discipline. Because his father clearly loves him, right? Yeah, she said, he clearly loves him. Oh, pastor's children. Please pray for them. I mean, it was such a picture.

Because here's the picture. We grow apathetic. We're like that little boy. We're running on along. We're doing what we want to do. We're going towards the curb. Nothing is going to happen to us. And this is God's divine discipline saying to his people: Stay awake, pay attention. The problem isn't always out there, it's in here. And like little children, we keep running. Yes, the Lord is gracious, and yes, the Lord is forgiving. But he will seize us by his hands, and in loving discipline, sometimes those hands will be his discipline. And that discipline will look like pain and trial and brokenness, because of the consequences of our spiritual apathy.

You see the drama is not about the timing. It's about the who. It's about the Lord Jesus. And he's preparing them with wise warning because he loves them, and he loves you, and he loves me. We don't know the time, but today we have this day. And every Sunday morning—every Sunday morning—lowercase divine discipline happens every Sunday morning, as he calls his people to worship, and we hear the scriptures read, and then we are invited—as we were this morning—to confess our sins to him. And in that place we begin to confess our apathy—our sins that we've allowed to creep in that distract us, that fill us with things that do not last, but actually form as a function of spiritual or physical poison that will rust us from the inside out. And then we just say well, the Lord will forgive me. Yes, he will, but that is cheap grace, to think that because he will forgive us, we can just keep running headlong into traffic

His love for us is so fierce that he will take whatever means is necessary to make us like himself. And friends, it hurts. But it is love. He saying this to his disciples, and we the readers and hearers must also hear: Stay awake, pay attention, be on your guard. For the lion prowls...for Satan prowls like a lion, seeking whom he may devour. But the truth is that Christ in his victory over sin and death has us securely in his hands. That doesn't mean that we will not face the consequences of the choices that we make, but in his mercy he restores us.

So as we were leaving the parking lot, that father had his child now in his arms, holding him, and the child was now playing with his father's shirt. What once in a moment was discipline, was demonstrated to be love, and there was restoration. Please hear me when I say that. God's divine discipline always leads to restoration. And so hear: Be on guard, keep awake.

Now he says here: "And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake." And he certainly meant that for his disciples who were hearing it, who didn't understand it. Telling them to stay awake. Jesus knew what was coming. He knew that they would abandon him. And yet he also knew in his divine love he would restore them, make them his own, and send them out to be the beginning of the church, of which we are a byproduct of what the Lord was doing through his disciples.

But I believe—as I said last week and I continue to maintain—that what this is referring to is a historical event, which we now know, looking back with 20/20, we see that A.D. 70 happened. That that which Jesus prophesied took place. That Jesus has been vindicated—not only vindicated as a Messiah, because he died on the cross because of human sin, taking the weight of sin upon his shoulders, but being raised to life on the third day victorious over sin and death. Jesus was vindicated in his messiahship, but he's also vindicated in being the prophet.

That said, it is necessary for me to then say to you, as I imagine some of you would say—and we've had this conversation even this week—OK, but is there anything here we ought to glean for now. Is there...Are there lessons here for us that do lead us to understand and expect the

second coming. And my answer to that is yes. The first is—and we look at your second point-- **Already and the Not Yet.** The first thing I would say is, first, the 'already' is the kingdom of God has come in Jesus Christ. The kingdom of God has been established, and Jesus is seated on the throne at God's right hand, reigning. That is 'already.' The payment for sin is paid in full. God's wrath has been satisfied. Judgment on sin and death has been given. Satan has been judged. But it is not yet fully finished. It has not yet all been fulfilled. That is yet to come. So we have lots of 'already,' which gives us hope, which gives us encouragement, and which gives us assurance.

How are we to understand, then, what is the 'not yet'? How ought we to live these things out? Well, if Jesus told his disciples—as I believe he tells us—to be on guard, keep awake, what ought we to be doing? Well, I could pick many, but I pick two. First is to remember the Lord's Prayer. Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

What he means is that those who follow the Lord Jesus are recognized in their demonstration of not only seeking forgiveness from the Heavenly Father through the work of Christ, it is also characterized by those who give forgiveness. So how are we to be preparing for that which has not yet happened? To be about the work of Jesus. He told us to pray like this not because we're literally meant to pray exactly like this every time—it's meant to be a model. But this model is global in scale and personal in its intimacy, and it's specific in its actions.

Jesus would also say at the end of Matthew: "Make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything which I have commanded you." Meaning that because Jesus is reigning and victorious and has been vindicated and is true and what he prophesies, and he says we don't know and he tells us to be alert, that what we ought to be about is doing that which Jesus has commanded us to do by God's grace and the power of his Spirit. We don't do that which Jesus commanded us because we're trying to achieve his grace. Rather, we do so because we are empowered by his grace.

So we ought to know what Jesus commanded us to do. And one great place to do that is John Chapter 17, when Jesus prays for those who would believe because of the message of the disciples. "I do not ask only for these, but also for those who believe in me through their word (that is, the disciples' word), that they may all be one, just as you, the Father, are in me and I am in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may know that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and love them even as you loved me."

He's telling them love one another. It goes back to what we looked at a couple weeks ago. "To love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself." In other words, the secondary application from hearing these words directed to the disciples is very much an application for us to walk with Jesus and to follow him in discipleship. That Christianity is more than just about receiving forgiveness. It is about growing and becoming more like Christ. This is what theologians call sanctification. Growing in acts of

love to him and to one another and to live out the forgiveness that we have received.

There's more I could say, but I will stop there and continue to this second part of 'already and the not yet.' Then what ought we to say, then, regarding final things? End times. As I close this portion of the book of Mark, we're going to turn away from Mark to another part of the New Testament. Because we will not find here words from Jesus regarding his second coming, but we do find it in a lot of the New Testament. And the most principal place we find it is from the writer Paul. And there's a place where I want you to hear it in Colossians Chapter 3. Here is what Paul says. Colossians 3:1-4.

"If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things that are above, not on things that are on earth." What he simply means is it's not that earth is bad, heaven is good. He's talking about ways of thinking and ways of understanding. What pleases the Lord are that which is of heaven where he is seated, and he is simply talking about the way in which we live. With that said, he continues in saying, "For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you will appear with him in glory."

So hold that in your mind. Notice what Paul says: 'when Jesus appears.' In the letter from John he says this, in 1 John 2:28. "And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming. If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him." Now, two things happen in those verses as it happens in Paul. You see, the way in which the Church of Jesus Christ has talked about the second coming over the last hundred twenty years has been emphasizing this word 'coming' which we get from the Greek word *Parousia*, and this whole idea that when he comes, he will come again on a cloud. And there's this popular language. Part of it has been drawn from Mark 13; part is from other places. But what is interesting is, you look deeper into the rest of the teaching of the New Testament, that they use the word 'appearing' and the word 'coming' together, and that, therefore, they are synonymous.

And what our theology actually teaches us is that Jesus, who is with the Father, is also present by his Spirit. Somewhere over these last hundred twenty years we've gotten this idea that as Jesus went up and ascended, that somehow God and heaven are somewhere a long way away in time and space. And so, therefore, in his second coming Jesus will come from a long way away and there he will come. But the reality is that we have no indication from scripture that heaven or that God and Christ are somewhere in time and space a long way away. What we do know is we cannot see them where they are. And that God and God's world, his heaven, encompasses all that he is and all that he has made.

And so when Paul says 'at his appearing,' I do not believe what he is referring to is this space where Jesus will come from on high on a cloud, but rather he will *appear*. Because guess what, he's present. We have no indication from scripture that Jesus is like the great clockmaker, and he has created all things, that God by his will, through the word of his power through his Son, through whom all things have been made, has somehow made it and then just left the building. What if we say what our theology teaches us to say. That God is everywhere present. Not in a pantheistic way, but that God is present in his presence. That Jesus is reigning, and he is present specifically in the hearts of his believers and those who are gathered in his name—where two

or more are gathered, there he is also by the power of his Spirit. It is a mystery and cannot be logically comprehended, but rather these words tell us that he will *appear*, and that word 'appears' is used with 'coming'.

In other words, he is here. We cannot see him, but he is here. But on that day when God says his will has been fulfilled—and we do not know that time or that place—he will appear. And the trumpet will sound. Now, will it be a literal trumpet? That's apocalyptic use of tools in literature. Or will it be a trumpet? I don't know. How will everybody see it? Literally. How will everybody see it? Will be through the mechanism of CNN? I don't know. Do you? But I know this: I don't know when and I don't know exactly what mechanism, but he says he will appear.

And those who are children of light, those who are united to Christ, will appear with him in his glory, in the weight of his holiness. And we will see perfectly, just as we are perfectly known. But those who do not know him will receive that which they've been working for: life without God. And life without God is how the Bible would describe hell, but now that hell will be of our own making and of our own choosing. And it will be eternally separated, yet knowing who God is, but eternally separated from his pleasure.

The second coming is promised. Read it in Corinthians. Read it in Thessalonians. Read it in Colossians. Read it in 1 John. Read it all over the New Testament. But we find the same things to hold true. In every place: Stay awake, be alert. Place your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. And until he returns, walk in his ways by the grace you have been given and look with eager hope for his appearing. He is the Lord, who is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, reigning, but on that day he will appear victorious.

Do you know this Lord? Whose vindication is written about in history, whose vindication is written about in this book, victorious over sin and death, who has prophesied great things that have come to pass. And those closest to him have said he is coming again and he will appear. Are you ready? Stay awake. Look to him for grace and salvation. May he do this in us, and may he make us a church increasingly loving the Lord Jesus and walking in his ways.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your grace and your mercy. We thank you for the promise that has come true and yet the promises which have not yet been fulfilled. We would pray as with all generations past, Come, Lord Jesus. Make all things new. Make your righteousness shine as the glory of a new heaven and a new earth. And we ask you, O Lord, until that day, may the Gospel of Jesus Christ in its power go forth. May those who do not know you come to know your amazing grace. And those who do know it—may we rejoice and by your Spirit stay awake. Make us aware of spiritual apathy that we might come to you for restoration. Do this in us, we pray, as we await your coming and your appearing. In Jesus' name. Amen.