

**Mark 13:24-37** "But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light;<sup>25</sup> the stars of heaven will fall, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.<sup>26</sup> Then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory.<sup>27</sup> And then He will send His angels, and gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest part of earth to the farthest part of heaven.<sup>28</sup> "Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender, and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near.<sup>29</sup> So you also, when you see these things happening, know that it is near--at the doors!<sup>30</sup> Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.<sup>31</sup> Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.<sup>32</sup> "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.<sup>33</sup> Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is.<sup>34</sup> *It is* like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch.<sup>35</sup> Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming--in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning--<sup>36</sup> lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping.<sup>37</sup> And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!"

This is my third week of wrestling with this passage. And I am still very tentative. I find that I am believing both sides of an argument. The argument is, what time is this talking about? Is it past? Or is it future? Or could it be both?

If this passage is talking about the future, then very little of it would have applied to the disciples who were asking the question. Yet that does not seem to be true. Jesus says nothing to make them think that they are not being addressed.

But if it is talking about a historical event, then we have nothing to apply from it other than the example that it provides.

I keep coming back to **this prophecy of Christ's** being much like the **Old Testament prophecies** of the **coming** Messiah were. In that prophecy there would be references to Christ's coming **as a servant** and His **coming as a King**. It was referring to two periods of time but mixed together as if it were one. And no scholar appears to have had absolute certainty of how it would play out until it finally did. But **when it did**, there was scripture they could look back on and finally understand. I keep coming back to the view that this is what our passage is doing this morning. To the disciples it would have been referring to two future events and that would not have been clear to them. To us it is referring to a past event and a future event.

Please understand that I am not certain about this. I would not be dogmatic about it. I hope that all of you are studying the text as well so that you can see

where any of the things I am teaching don't hold up. Every Adult Sunday School class provides a perfect opportunity for doing this.

Now to review

Peter James John and Andrew asked Christ-

**Mark 13:4**

<sup>4</sup> **"Tell us, when will these things be? And what *will be* the sign when all these things will be fulfilled?"**

Christ covers a lot of territory in his answer.

**First-** there will be false Messiahs. There were from AD30 to AD70 and all futurist views of Revelation say that there will be more at the end.

**Second-** increased wars

**Third-** increased earthquakes

**Fourth-** Famines and troubles

This is all the beginning of the end. These things will gradually escalate and the closer to the end the more rapidly they will escalate.

**Fifth-** The disciples, for sure, and probably believers most everywhere will be persecuted first by the Jewish religion, and then by the civil governments. It is interesting to me that Jesus is specific in talking about synagogues. That would be an indication of a historic event, since the Jews are not prophesied about having world rule until the saints rule the earth after Christ returns. But when looking at the Greek word **synagogue** I found that this word is also used as an analogy of the church. So, if this is true, the persecution would not be limited to coming only from **Jewish** sources. The false church could also be the source of future persecution.

This is easy to imagine in our environment. In order for **false** churches to disassociate themselves with the unpopular message the **true** churches are preaching, the false will be quick to turn against the true with rabid hatred. Biblical teaching about homosexuality is one of the most evident places where we see that happening today.

So Jesus gave specific instructions about persecution to His disciples as the 5<sup>th</sup> point.

In the middle of that we find the **sixth** point. The gospel message will spread across the world, to every people group. The word for nation is the word ethnos where we get the word ethnic. It really means people groups rather than nationalistic boundaries.

The **seventh** sign is kind of part of the 5<sup>th</sup>. Families will be the source of persecution. Family members will deliver up family members. The gospel is going to create enmity in families.

And eighth is the **abomination of desolation**.

Then Jesus gives specific instructions about what to do. Flee Judea. Now that is a specific geographic region and I don't know what else to do about it. If it is referring to the future, that will require that the temple be rebuilt as far as I can tell. If that is accurate Christ cannot return to judge the world until that temple is completed.

Then Jesus talks about how bad things will be during that time. In fact it is so bad that it had to be shortened or the elect would have been given more than they could handle.

Again there will be more deceptions and false spiritual leaders. But Christ basically says, take heed to what I have said. Remember it and go by it.

This brings us to our text this morning.

Vs24 "**But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light**

**Mt 24:29 says immediately after the distress of those days.** This makes it a bit harder on us. It doesn't allow a long time between the last verse and this verse. If it did, we might be able to separate the destruction of the temple and the events of Christ's final return. It could still mean that it is applicable twice. And that is what I currently think.

Now, critics of the Bible have a blast with things like verse 24. They will say, oh yes, the sun will be darkened. Scientifically that would result in the destruction of all life on the planet. Yet they will listen to all manner of songs using figurative language and speak of their truth. They will tell someone, wasn't the sunrise beautiful this morning, while fully believing that the sun doesn't rise, the earth spins.

The imagery here comes from old testament passages.

**Isaiah 13:9-11**

**<sup>9</sup> Behold, the day of the LORD comes, Cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger, To lay the land desolate; And He will destroy its sinners from it. <sup>10</sup> For the stars of heaven and their constellations Will not give their light; The sun will be darkened in its going forth, And the moon will not cause its light to shine. <sup>11</sup> "I will punish the world for *its* evil, And the wicked for their iniquity; I will halt the arrogance of the proud, And will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible.**

I don't believe these are intended to be scientific references. They are statements of what people on our planet will experience. They are figuratively true, in that the light we **expect from the sun** won't reach us. Neither will the moon light.

We see this in Ezekiel 32

**Ezekiel 32:3-8**

**<sup>3</sup> "Thus says the Lord GOD: 'I will therefore spread My net over you with a company of many people, And they will draw you up in My net. <sup>4</sup> Then I will**

leave you on the land; I will cast you out on the open fields, And cause to settle on you all the birds of the heavens. And with you I will fill the beasts of the whole earth. <sup>5</sup> I will lay your flesh on the mountains, And fill the valleys with your carcass. <sup>6</sup> 'I will also water the land with the flow of your blood, *Even* to the mountains; And the riverbeds will be full of you. <sup>7</sup> When I put out your light, I will cover the heavens, and make its stars dark; I will cover the sun with a cloud, And the moon shall not give her light. <sup>8</sup> All the bright lights of the heavens I will make dark over you, And bring darkness upon your land,' Says the Lord GOD.

And again

**Amos 8:9**

<sup>9</sup> "And it shall come to pass in that day," says the Lord GOD, "That I will make the sun go down at noon, And I will darken the earth in broad daylight;

Let's go on.

**Mark 13:24-37 ;<sup>25</sup> the stars of heaven will fall, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.**

Scientifically if a star were to hit our planet the planet would incinerate before it ever reached us. I have often thought it is far more likely that meteorites will hit us. It will look like stars falling. And there will be events happening in space that will be different than anything we are used to.

I came across this interpretation in the New International Greek Testament Commentary. I don't know how true it is. But it appears to me that this must be somehow at least partially figurative language.

**In the original prophetic context, such 'cosmic' language conveys a powerful symbolism of political changes within world history, and is not naturally to be understood of a literal collapse of the universe at the end of the world. It is, in the words of Wright, 'typical Jewish imagery for events within the present order that are felt and perceived as "cosmic" or, as we should say, "earth-shattering".**

The New International Greek Testament Commentary - The New International Greek Testament Commentary – The Gospel of Mark.

Whatever the case, these passages are always referring to God pouring out his wrath upon the people of the earth. They are expressions of a final judgment. There will be visible manifestations of what is going on. And they will be truly awful.

<sup>26</sup> **Then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. <sup>27</sup> And then He will send His angels, and gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest part of earth to the farthest part of heaven.**

Ok, we have seen some truly cataclysmic events. They are earth shattering events. They would have everyone's attention. Everyone will know that something ominous is going on.

And then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds.

This is where I have trouble believing this is still talking about a past event. The first question is, who are the "they". The "they", in context would be the inhabitants of the earth.

Now those who say this was accomplished back in AD 70 will say that this is all figurative language. They say that this "seeing" took place when either the temple was destroyed or people came into the church from all over the globe. Both of those things did happen, but I have a tendency to read this literally and don't see any reason not to. It makes sense to me that it will be literally fulfilled in the future. And immediately following the visible return of Christ will be the judgment of the sheep and the goats.

pause

There are times that I think that what we believe is stranger the strangest science fiction. We believe in a God that exists and holds creation together by the power of His will. He created it by **speaking** it into existence. He communed with man in the person of Adam. The fellowship was broken by Eve's sin. But God always had a plan to prepare people to live with Him for eternity. In fact, that is what this project has always been about.

Christ, in the fullness of time, came to this planet to buy back for the Father all the children God had chosen. He came. He paid the full penalty for what our sins deserved. Now He offers salvation to anyone who will believe in Christ in the truest of ways. He offers salvation to anyone who will receive for themselves what Christ did for him or her, and turn from the sins that cost Christ His life, and live for the glory of God. He has prepared an eternal dwelling for each and every one of them.

And at some date in the future the New Jerusalem Christ has prepared for us will be transported down to planet earth. It will be big enough for all the children of God. Isn't that a spectacular story? Yet it is true.

One day Christ will return to this planet in a visibly extreme fashion. And everyone will know on that day what had been true all along. Christ is real. And God has given Him all authority. They will no longer believe the mamby-pamby stories they had been told of an impotent or non-existent savior. They will see with their own eyes the power and glory of God. And it will be one day too late for them to do anything about it.

Now there is an amazing story. But it is completely true. We believe some amazing things. The future will make star wars movies look mild. The forces of good and evil will be clearly defined and the evil will be eliminated.

Notice that it will be the angels who gather all of God's people. Isn't that cool? We must all have AFD's. Angel Frequency Devices. God knows where we are and who we are. And He will send the angels to fetch us.

This is an amazing truth, an earth shaking truth. There is nobody in a third category at this point. Either you have received Christ by faith as the Lord and Savior of your life or you haven't. Either you have prayed to Christ, receiving Him as Lord and committing your life to Him, or you haven't. There is no middle ground. Everyone will be gathered and there are only two options, sheep for rewards or goats for destruction. That is it. And God knows where every single one of His children are right now. And we are important to Him. Why? Because God is like that. He loves his children, even the ones that are difficult to love. Now, up till now it has been difficult to be certain that we understand the time frames. It is difficult to know what meanings are figurative or literal. It is difficult to be sure we are getting it all right. But I think the rest of our text this morning helps us to apply what it is we are surely supposed to get from this passage.

<sup>28</sup> **"Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender, and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. <sup>29</sup> So you also, when you see these things happening, know that it is near--at the doors!**

Jesus is taking what He just said and is telling His disciples, and I believe us, what to do with it. He is giving us the key to understanding and applying it.

He refers to the fig tree for us to learn one thing. A fig tree shows a visible change right before a certain event. When we see the change, we know the event is imminent.

Now Christ says when you see the things **I have told you about** happening, when you see the visible changes, you will know the event is imminent. It is going to happen. It is right at the doors. In other words, when you see this thing, it is like the messenger has shown up at your house to announce this thing and is standing at your door with his hand ready to knock. That is how close and how true it is.

<sup>30</sup> **Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.**

There are three ways of understanding this. And this is why it is so hard to dismiss those who say that this whole event has already happened.

First the "this generation" is the one that Jesus was physically speaking to. He spoke in about 33 AD so 70 AD would be, loosely speaking, in the same generation. So if Christ were referring to the destruction of the temple and using a lot of figurative language to describe what surrounded that event, then the generation He was speaking of was the generation He was talking to.

Second, if Christ is talking about a future event the "this generation" must be the generation that is alive when all of these signs begin to escalate. That is what most futurists believe. There is no reason that this could not be true.

Or third, Christ is talking about both. He is saying there is a generation that will experience it now and a generation that will experience a replay later. That is what I think, but I am not sure about it.

Whatever the case, Christ is not talking about some vague periods of time. He is talking about something that will come to fruition less than 40 years from the beginning of the signs being fulfilled. Are we in that time? I don't know. But I think we can all see we are headed in that direction. Everything is lining up.

<sup>31</sup> **Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.**

There have been many human, so called "prophets" that have painted pictures of mankind's future vastly different than Christ has painted it. Oddly enough everything that Christ has said is showing itself to be true.

It's like what is said about college text books. The Bible was written once and has never needed a revision. Text books have to be written every year. God's word is authoritative. It is true. It will not change.

We cannot count on the upcoming election to save us. We cannot count on the medical industry to save us. We cannot count on the discoveries of psychology to save us. That which we need most is learned when we read what God has said. His Word is the truth we need and it never changes.

You know, we talk about this over and over again. We all know the pat answers. We all know the right things to say if we are **with** Christians. But in our heart of hearts and soul of souls we often have a problem. We simply do not believe what God says. We think that what the devil whispers in our ears is more true than that which God has clearly stated. He tells us we will find our happiness by going against God's plan. We will find our happiness by disobeying God and following our heart. We believe the devil's reward to be more satisfying than God's. We can tell that is what we believe because of what we do when no one is watching. How do we ACT inside of our families? On the computer? In conversations that no one sees? In the thoughts we foster in our minds?

When are we going to get it? When will our sinful resistance to God's will meet the conviction it so richly deserves? God's words are sure. They are trustworthy. They are true. And they will never be proven, at any time by any source, to be untrue.

What ideas are we banking our lives on? What do we really think will satisfy us? Where do we resist the rules that God has put in place in our lives? What ideas steal our hearts? If they aren't from God, they aren't trustworthy. Only God's truth is worth banking our lives on. Only He will lead us to the place we ultimately want to go. Every departure we make from His path will only lead to regrets and sorrow. God's word will never pass away.

<sup>32</sup> **"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. <sup>33</sup> Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is.**

Again we are told that nobody knows the when. No one knows the date. The final generation will know it is getting close. The final generation will know they are close to the end. The signs will be hard to miss if they know God's word. But even then, the day that Christ shows up is not marked on anyone's calendar. Only God knows that day.

And what is the application for that truth?

Jesus says **Take heed, watch and pray**

Stay alert and keep watchful. Keep your eyes open and don't forget to look out. Keep talking to God. Keep in communion with Him. Keep your relationship fresh. Why? Because this is not something you can put in your daytimer or on your calendar. You can't put a pop up on your phone that says **Christ's return 24 days**. We need to keep our eyes on world events and trends. We don't need to be absorbed with it. But it is good to keep a thumb on the pulse. We don't want to be surprised.

Then Jesus makes an analogy to help us apply this.

<sup>34</sup> ***It is like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch. <sup>35</sup> Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming--in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning-- <sup>36</sup> lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. <sup>37</sup> And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!***

We gain a little more application guidance in Luke.

**Luke 21:34-36**

<sup>34</sup> **"But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. <sup>35</sup> For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. <sup>36</sup> Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man."**

So we are like the people left to serve the Master's interests in His house. We were given assignments by our Master. We are given the work of evangelism and discipleship. We are to love God and love people. We are to serve our fellow body members. We are to grow in our relationship with God. This stuff needs done. It is work we are to give our attention to.

In Christ's story the people are to live by watching. They are to live in anticipation of the return of the Master. They are to live carrying out **His will** since they know



He is coming back. And that attention should never be slackened, no matter how long it takes. We are to **live in the belief of our Master's return**.

What are the alternatives? Life as usual. Life like everyone else. The word for carousing presents an image much like our word for hangover. The alternative to live by watching is to live absorbed on what the world can offer us in terms of pleasure and satisfaction. It is one thing to enjoy those things that God has given to us. We find in Ecclesiastes that **this is a good thing**. But to live our lives **for pleasure, to love pleasure**, to expect pleasure to grant us what only God can grant us, that is the height of idolatry and foolishness. We aren't to give ourselves over to pleasure in this life. We aren't to **live for pleasure**. And as well we are not to be absorbed by the cares of this life. We aren't to be absorbed by the same things that the world around us is absorbed by. We are to carry with us, in everything we do, the awareness of eternity. We are to live like people who are serving a Master. We have a future destination and it isn't this world, at least not the way it is now. Our lives will have certain restrictions that the worldlings don't have. Believers will have a focus on **what can't be seen** that those around us don't understand. We will be more concerned with **eternal** security than **temporal** security.

And we are to live with an understanding of the times we live in. We don't expect the world to offer us a wonderful life. We don't expect the economy to stay strong so we can best enjoy our lives. We don't expect civil authorities to always deal out justice. We know what this world is destined for and we live accordingly. To the world around us, Christ's return will be like a snare. It will catch them unawares as they are just going about their lives. And it will be to their peril. But we should pray that we are not such people. We should pray that God has His way in our lives and that we live for Him. We should pray that Christ's return will not catch us in faithless living, but that it will catch us wildly looking forward to our Savior's return. Because everything that is worth living for is only found in Him.

That is the gist of the passage. What we are **waiting for** is what we are **living for**. Can what we do each day be described as living to get what we want **here and now**? Do we disobey God in our responses to those who have authority over us, to those who surround us, to those we answer for? Do we do what we feel like doing? Like what we feel compelled to do? Or are we **waiting**? Are we doing what our Master says and waiting **for Him** to make it worth while? Do we trust our own wisdom and reasoning? Or do we trust Him? Do we see it smart to look out for our interests? Or smart to look out for **His**? What master do we serve as we live in this period of history? We need to pray that God leads us in living for Him and for Him alone. We cannot afford to be found asleep to God when Christ returns. We must live attentive to God's will as long as we breathe.

Let's close with this passage.

## **2 Peter 3:10-18**

<sup>10</sup> But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. <sup>11</sup> Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner *of persons* ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, <sup>12</sup> looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? <sup>13</sup> Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. <sup>14</sup> Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; <sup>15</sup> and consider *that* the longsuffering of our Lord *is* salvation--..... <sup>17</sup> You therefore, beloved, since you know *this* beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; <sup>18</sup> but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him *be* the glory both now and forever. Amen.