

Jesus Messiah: Seeing Christ In The Gospel Of Mark

*“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”
(Mark 1:15 ESV)*

*And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said,
“Truly this man was the Son of God!”
(Mark 15:38–39 ESV)*

The Eschatological Discourse

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Mark 13:1-37

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Introduction:

Good morning. I want to invite you to open your Bibles this morning to Mark 13:1; that’s on page 849 in your pew Bibles. The entirety of Mark 13 is taken up with what scholars refer to as “The Eschatological Discourse Of Jesus”. The word ‘discourse’ refers to a sermon or a message and the word “Eschatological” is a big fancy word that means “stuff about the end”. So in street level English, this is a sermon that Jesus gave on the Mount of Olives about the end of all things on this earth. The sermon was given in response to a question asked by the disciples as they were admiring the magnificence of the temple. The temple in Jesus’ day was absolutely central in the religious system of the Jews. It was an intellectual and spiritual “immovable object” in the minds of the disciples. They couldn’t imagine anything more important or anything more permanent than the temple so Jesus begins by prophesying its destruction.

Now scholars often point out the importance of noticing that the disciples ask a 2 part question. They ask when will the temple be destroyed AND what will be the sign that ALL THESE THINGS will be accomplished? Now, here’s the tricky part: they almost certainly had no idea that they had just asked a two part question. They thought they were asking a 1 part question, meaning they must have assumed that the destruction of the temple WOULD BE THE END OF ALL THINGS. They could not imagine a religious system without the temple at its centre. In their minds if the temple was destroyed that would have to be the end of the world. But Jesus

knew that it would not be so he divides their question into two parts whether they understand it or not.

Now – chances are you are already confused and that’s ok. This is the most complicated discourse in all of Mark’s Gospel – it might be the most complicated discourse in all the New Testament – so don’t feel bad if your head is starting to swim. We’ll take our time and work our way through what Jesus said and then we’ll spend some time doing what I think Jesus would want us to do. Jesus didn’t give this information to entertain us or to fuel our escapist fantasies – no – Jesus told us about the future so that we could live better in the present – and so we’ll spend some time at the end talking about how we should live in light of what Jesus said about the end of all things on this earth.

Hear now the Word of the Lord; beginning at verse 1.

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!” 2 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.”

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

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

14 “But when you see the abomination of desolation standing where he ought not to be (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. 15 Let the one who is on the housetop not go down, nor enter his house, to take anything out, 16 and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak. 17 And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! 18 Pray that it may not happen in winter. 19 For in those days there will be such tribulation as has not been from the beginning of the creation that God created until now, and never will be. 20 And if the Lord had not cut short the days, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect, whom he chose, he shortened the days. 21 And then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘Look, there he is!’ do not believe it. 22 For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform signs and wonders, to lead astray, if possible, the elect. 23 But be on guard; I have told you all things beforehand. 24 “But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, 25 and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. 26 And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. 27 And then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

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. 29 So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. 30 Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. 31 Heaven and earth will pass

away, but my words will not pass away.

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.” (Mark 13:1–37 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord – thanks be to God!

Now as I said off the top, the key to understanding this discourse is to remember that the disciples asked a 2 part question - they didn't know it was a 2 part question but Jesus did and so some of what Jesus says relates to the destruction of the temple which happened in AD 70 and some of it relates to events which are way further down in the future. But there is a sense in which the best way to anticipate those future events is to see them through the lens of the Jerusalem catastrophe. Scholars refer to this as “prophetic telescoping” – meaning Jesus is encouraging the disciples to see the far future through the lens of the near future. The catastrophe of AD 69/70 will foreshadow the ultimate catastrophe of Satan's Little Season or The Great Tribulation; however you want to refer to that. Just as Rome encircled Jerusalem so shall the Anti-Christ and his powers encircle the people of God in the last days. That is the basic idea.

However, we will do our best to separate out the various aspects of Jesus' answer.

Probably the first thing we need to do is look at verses 7-8. By the way, this sermon will only work with your Bible open. Its going to be confusing even with your Bible open – it's going to be absolutely incomprehensible without. In verses 7-8, Jesus says:

And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. This must take place, but the end is not yet. 8 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. (Mark 13:7–8 ESV)

So Jesus says that a bunch of things are going to happen that you are going to think are associated with the end - but they're not! They are associated with the beginning! They are, I suppose you could say, the beginning of the end. They are the birth pangs. Jesus says that God is going to prepare for the coming of the kingdom by throwing the world into a type of labour. Just like a woman may have many hours of labour to prepare the birth canal for the baby so too the world will go through a long and painful season of contractions and catastrophes in order to position it

finally for the birth of the Kingdom of God. And as any woman knows - and as many a husband comes to know as well - that can take a lot longer than we expect. That's what Jesus is saying here.

Then he goes on to say in verses 9-13 that all throughout this season of contraction and catastrophe the Gospel will go forth into all the world. The time between the ascension of Christ and the return of Christ is characterized – simultaneously – by two things: tribulation and evangelization. Things are going to get tough AND the Gospel is going to get out. It's going to get out far and wide – to every nation in the world - he says that in verse 10. So it's going to be the best of times and the worst of times. People are going to get saved – cultures are going to be transformed – and Christians are going to be imprisoned, persecuted, rejected and killed.

But the one who endures to the end will be saved – verse 13.

By the way, take note of that. The Bible has no category for the “in again, out again” Christian. You either persevere in worship and mission for Jesus through tribulation or you are simply not saved. Saved people persevere. Those who are not saved, quickly fall away under pressure and persecution – that's what the Bible says.

Now verses 14-23 are hotly debated by good people on either side of the argument. Some understand these verses as applying to the immediate catastrophe in Jerusalem. In fact many in the early church cited this very warning as the reason that they were able to flee Jerusalem in advance of the Romans. They saw the desolation of the Romans coming and they got out of there and the tribulation that followed was absolutely horrific. It is often referred to as the most brutal episode in Roman history. So there are many who believe that verses 14-23 are entirely historical, from our perspective – meaning that there is nothing in them about the future, they refer entirely to completed events in the past.

Others however are not so sure. They would say that while these verses can and did apply to the immediate catastrophe of AD 70 they also apply in a secondary sense to the Great Tribulation still ahead. That too will be a time of unsurpassed suffering for the covenant community and we should watch for the abomination of desolation once again. And when we see it we should run for our lives.

Now, that phrase ‘the abomination of desolatio’n is Bible code. Mark even tells us that. There is an editorial comment there in parentheses in your Bible. In verse 14 Mark says:

Let the reader understand (v. 14)

That is to say, let the reader understand that I am speaking in Bible code. This is a reference to the abominations associated with Antiochus Epiphanes. He had sacrificed a pig on the altar in the temple and had led a 3.5 year season of very intense persecution of the Jews during which he tried to force them to adopt the values and ethos of Greek culture. He tried to make them religious pluralists and he tried to get them to loosen up on morality – he even tried to get them to exercise in the nude – and those who wouldn’t get on board he slaughtered. But that was like 200 years ago from Mark’s perspective, so for Jesus to use that language and for Mark to insert that comment means that we are to look for similar persecutions and similar desecrations in the future as an indication that times of intense tribulation are at hand. “In the future watch for the past” – that’s what Mark is saying. There is a bit of a repeating cycle – there is a bit of predictable lead up – if you know what to watch for then you can anticipate what is coming.

Now the good news is that God always limits what the devil can do in these difficult seasons. He doesn’t allow them to completely overwhelm the saints and he doesn’t allow them to go on forever. Jesus says that in verse 20:

for the sake of the elect, whom he chose, he shortened the days. (Mark 13:20 ESV)

Thanks be to God!

Verses 24-27 – in the next section - describe the second coming of Christ. Look at verse 24:

after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, 25 and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. 26 And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. 27 And then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven. (Mark 13:24–27 ESV)

After the tribulation of those days the Son of Man will come riding on the clouds and he will send out his angels and he will gather in his elect from the four corners of the earth - praise the

Lord!

Jesus then provides a short explanatory parable. He says it will be like the budding of a fig tree. When a fig tree begins to bud then you know the harvest is at hand. This means that there will not be a great delay between the start of this process and its conclusion. Jesus has already said that for the sake of the elect it will be shortened. That is why one of the alternative names for the Great Tribulation is “Satan’s LITTLE Season”. It is not forever - in fact Jesus says in verse 30 that the generation that sees its start will see it end. That means that it will last no longer than 40 years - the typical length of a generation in the Bible. But of course, it could last far less.

No one knows.

And that is the last thing that Jesus says in this sermon. Look at verse 32.

“But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” (Mark 13:32 ESV)

No one knows the specific times and dates - so if you meet someone who thinks they know, you are meeting a fool. They don’t know and therefore they should stop talking and you should stop listening.

No one knows.

But here is what you do know. You need to stay awake. You need to watch the signs. You need to know what time it is. And you need to live accordingly.

And that is what I want to talk about next.

In the Bible a connection is made between eschatology and ethics. Meaning – the things we know about the future should influence the way we live in the present. You can hear that all the time in the Bible. The Apostle Paul says for example in Romans 8:

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. (Romans 8:18 ESV)

When I think about the future, Paul says, it changes how I look at the present! It changes the math with respect to my mission! It changes how I calculate the cost! When I think about final judgment and heaven and hell and eternal reward then all the sudden the price I have to pay to follow Jesus seems inconsequentially SMALL.

That is how eschatology transforms human ethics. And the New Testament writers spent a lot of time thinking about that. The Bible does not want you to be entertained by eschatology – this isn't in the Bible to provide content for your next colourful chart – it is there to change the way you live before God and with your unsaved neighbour. So let's talk about that – and let's get help from a guy who was there. Peter was there in Mark 13 – we've said before that Mark's Gospel is really Peter's Gospel – Mark was Peter's secretary and scribe – so Mark 13 represents Peter's recollection of that discourse. This is Peter's eschatology so we are interested in how Peter connected that to Christian ethics – and to discover that I want you to turn in your Bibles to 2 Peter 3:11-18; that's on page 1019 in your Bible. Peter says:

Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, 12 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! 13 But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. 14 Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. 15 And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, 16 as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures. 17 You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. 18 But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. (2 Peter 3:11–18 ESV)

Isn't that interesting?! Knowing all this ahead of time – since all these things are thus to be dissolved – what sort of people ought we to be? That is exactly the question we need to be thinking about.

Given what Jesus said about the future what sort of people ought we to be in the present?

I think we can pull 6 things out of this paragraph that Peter provides.

The first thing I think we can say is that we ought to be HOLY people.

1. Holy

I suppose that is the most obvious. It's so obvious Peter, sort of assumes it in verse 11 – he says, what sort of people ought we to be as we are living holy and righteous lives – it's a given for Peter that if you know the end then you are going to pursue holiness in the present – but then just in case it's not a given, he repeats it in command form in verse 14:

be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish (2 Peter 3:14 ESV)

Whatever's wrong with you, get it sorted out before Jesus comes. That makes a ton of sense – because the Bible says, without holiness no one will see the Lord – Hebrews 12:14. So, you've got the grace of God, you've got the Holy Spirit, you've got the Bible and you've got Christian community – put all that to work towards the end of your own holiness. Because judgment is coming and you want there to be sufficient evidence to convict you of Christian faith.

The second thing we see in this paragraph is that we ought to be:

2. Patient

Let me just say it again: no one knows the day or the hour – so don't jump the gun, don't rent a billboard, don't print T-shirts and don't hide out in your basement. We need you and this could go on for a very long time. Listen we are still recovering from the silliness and hysteria around the year 2000 – which as you know features prominently in Biblical eschatology. (Raise sarcasm finger). No! Actually if you think about it, the only real time indicator we have is what Jesus said about world evangelism. He said:

this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. (Matthew 24:14 ESV)

So, all we really know is that it will happen AFTER the Gospel has been proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all NATIONS. Well, to state the obvious – that hasn't happened. According to the Joshua Project 41.6% of the people on planet earth are presently unreached with the Gospel – so we are BARELY half way done! On what basis then are you so sure that the return of the Lord is around the corner – it could be! It could be next week if there

was some super awesome revival where the Gospel spread through the internet and the Holy Spirit did a thing like back in the Book of Acts – it could – but on the other hand, it has taken us 2000 years to reach 59% of this planet with the Gospel so, it could conceivably be another 1389 years unless we pick up the pace.

And that is what Peter is telling them to do – that’s our third thing. He’s telling them to be engaged in the process.

3. Engaged

Look at verses 11-12:

what sort of people ought you to be ... waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God (2 Peter 3:11–12 ESV)

Well how to hasten the day of the Lord? The only thing I can think of is by spreading the Gospel faster and wider than ever before. So that’s what we should do. Given what we know about the future then we ought to be doing everything we can to take Christ to the nations.

The fourth thing Peter says is that we ought to be PEACEFUL.

4. Peaceful

He says that in verse 14. Christians don’t fight back. We love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. Why? Because we know how it ends. We know that no one gets away with anything. We know that vengeance belongs to the Lord – he will repay. Therefore, we just get on with it. We don’t have time for score settling – we have souls to save.

The fifth thing Peter says is that we need to be URGENT.

5. Urgent

Counting the patience of the Lord as salvation – verse 15. Why hasn’t Jesus come back? Do you

know what the answer is? Because when he comes back everyone who has not embraced the saving Gospel of Christ will be condemned and cast into hell and it is not God's will for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. So how do you think he wants us to spend our time? He wants us to spend our time in urgent appeal to the nations.

And then lastly, Peter wants us to be stable.

6. Stable

There are going to be crazy people out there – silly people, stupid people and sinful people – some of each – they're all going to be out there – one's going to have a billboard, one's going to have a show on TV and some are going to preach to you from the pulpit - and they are all going to be capable of distracting you from your mission.

Don't let them.

Read your Bible – that ought to help you know who to listen to and who not to. Read your Bible, remember the future – and stay on mission.

That is what Peter is telling them to do – and this is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God, let's pray together.