

## A Higher View (Part 1)

Mark 13:1-13

When you've been driving west on from Manitoba for a couple days (110km) you see signs that Calgary is getting closer. It's by far the largest city along the #1 hwy on the prairies. But when you finally begin seeing the tallest buildings from a distance...you are more impressed with the eastern edge of the Rocky Mountains. As you drive west, the view becomes even more impressive. At first it seems as if the mountains merge close together. The closer you drive the bigger the mountains get until they take up most of the sky. As you continue west, the road winds among them. Then you realise there are great distances from mountain peak to mountain peak. We can only imagine what this would have felt like for the first settlers on foot and horseback. It would take a long time to move around one mountain, only to find another behind it with a huge valley in between. Imagine climbing up one mountain to get your bearings for find a route...only to discover it's only the shoulder of a much larger mountain to climb.

1. From a distance, mountains seem close together but really, they are far apart
2. Most mountain peaks are not in sight when you are at the base.

You won't know until you are mostly there.

In our passage Mark 13, the disciples want to know the end...when Christ begins to rule the world. And Jesus answers them in a way that has puzzled people ever since. Just as mountains look close together when a range is viewed from afar...so the tradition of Bible prophecy interplay events that are far apart in time. Jesus predicts events that focus on the fate of the Temple and Jerusalem but also on events leading up to His return. The one is like a type and forshadow of the other. They seem close together...but as we've experienced 2000 years later...they're not. Here's a way to navigate through Mk 13

- 1-13 End of the Temple (A)
- 14-27 Tribulation/King's Return (B)
- 28-31 End of the Temple (A)
- 32-37 King's Return/ Watch (B)

So there's a back and forth – A, B, A, B. We'll also notice an overlap where some signs apply throughout

When I mention the phrase Bible prophecy, I imagine there would be several reactions. Maybe you've found it confusing or felt pressured to follow someone else's interpretation. For others, it's like kids in a candy store.

We've heard some teaching from Jesus about the future...when the Sadducees tried to make the idea of living in heaven crazy (Mk 12:18-27). And of course, Jesus made mincemeat of their argument. We learned the formal term for seeking to understand God's final plans. Repeat after me, 'Eschatology'.

The most zealous and studied eschatological teacher cannot see completely, the future. And brilliant people...devout followers have differed on points about the future for centuries. And some point of eschatology are essential...like Christ's visible return. Others...not so much (knowing the day Christ returns). The problem is not so much about us using our imaginations but rather dogmatically arguing a minor case and judge others by it...dividing believers into different camps on non-essentials of the faith according to the NT. God's Word is without mistake but human interpreters are fallible. I will pass on this caution: "Do not try to satisfy an unhealthy curiosity for the end times. It is a serious misuse of scripture to try and make it disclose more than God has purposed to reveal" (Alistair Begg)

But we are following the One who sees completely. The last thing God wants is for us to be divisive and quarrelling over things we can't fully see...until we see the Lord. Until then

love is patient, love is kind (1 Cor 13:8-12, Rom 12:9-21, 2 Tim 2:14-19).

The creeds of the early church were written wisely...sticking to the main doctrines to correct wrong philosophies about Christ. It is important that our statements of faith and practise reflect the spirit of the NT and make the main thing the main thing. What we need to know...is how Jesus wants us to live every day while we wait for His return. And that's what we're going to get from Mark Chapter 13.

### **Pray**

We're at the end of the day on Wednesday - heading back to Bethany for the night. Jesus has finished His public ministry. His teaching in the temple has ended. We would hope the disciples are deep in thought about the lessons over the past couple of days. Perhaps the pronouncement against the temple system and how Jesus handled the Sanhedrin's challenges to His authority. Perhaps about the greatest commandments and how the poor widow stood out as an example above the rich for giving all she had. But instead of grieving the state of the temple... being sickened by the waste of collecting money for a corrupted gold-plated den of thieves, one disciple is still awe by its appearance.

**v1 Look, Teacher!**

I guess we should give these guys a little break. Though it was still incomplete after 40 years, it would have been the largest most beautiful set of buildings they had ever seen. Herod's was the largest temple of the ancient world. One of the limestone blocks is reported by a historian at the time to have been about 40 feet long, 12 feet high and 18 feet deep (hundreds of thousands of lbs). There is still evidence of stones weighing 160,000 lbs. The 35-acre enclosure would fit 12 American football fields. And there was much gold and silver overlay. It would have been almost blinding in the sun...gold, silver and white.

### **v2 Do you really see?**

This would have been both a surprise and a signal for the disciples. They would see the end of the temple as the end of the age...when Jesus comes to set up God's kingdom on earth. Jesus does not reveal the destruction in vengeance but in grief. He wept for Jerusalem. He longed for them to believe and have everlasting peace. At that time...on a donkey, he knew the Romans would surround them and lay siege until they were too weak to fight. The walls would be torn to the ground...not leaving one stone upon another. Why does God allow this...they would not repent and believe His Son (Lk 19:41-44).

The Roman puppet ruler in Judea, Gessius Florus helped himself to silver from the temple when revenues were low. He hated Jews and cared little about their religion. When Jewish hostilities grew, he sent troops to Jerusalem and massacred 3,600 citizens. This sparked the first Jewish revolt in AD 66. The Zealots pulled off an amazing victory at the Roman stronghold, Masada and the revolt spread from Jerusalem to all Judea and then all Galilee...expelling or killing all the Roman troops. Cestius Callus, the Roman Governor laid siege to Jerusalem for 6 months but failed. Emperor Nero sent His general Vespasian to put down the rebellion. He was successful in Galilee and the Transjordan and Idumea, then on to Jerusalem. But Nero died and he was called to be the next emperor. One of His first acts was to appoint his son, Titus to conduct the Jewish War. As you can imagine, with those great forces available and Jerusalem all alone and cut off from any supplies...people began dying from starvation and the plague. The Romans came up with new war machines that hurled boulders and battered the walls with rams. There were three walls to break through so it still took a long time. The last defense was the temple. It is believed from Josephus' account, that Titus

wanted to preserve Herod's Temple but the soldiers were so angry they burned it to the ground. The remaining Jews were either slaughtered or sold as slaves (parts from Christianity Today)

What Jesus predicts, comes true. This is Jesus 1st prophecy in Mk 13.

Jesus is getting them to look beyond the corrupted Temple. Soon, no temple and sacrifice system will be needed for getting right with God. One Lamb: Jesus will gain His people entrance into God's presence from anywhere in the world. This reminds me of Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well.

*"Woman," Jesus replied, "believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth."*

*The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us."*

*Then Jesus declared, "I, the one speaking to you—I am he." (Jn 4:21-26)*

Do we realize the access we have to God by faith in Jesus? Do we see ourselves as His children?

I have to catch myself often...being distracted by things that seem massive and magnificent in this world. But we need to see beyond these things and 'thrilling' events as things that are temporary. They have no lasting value. I'm not saying we have to keep our heads continually down (although sometimes, yes). Don't be so thrilled by things of this world when it's time to talk about things that matter. They will not stand God's judgement. Instead, let's keep our mind and heart on seeking to know God and share His love. Store up treasure that will last forever.

Jesus and the disciples continue back to their host home in Bethany. They walk back out the gates of Jerusalem and across the Kedron valley - east up to the Mount of Olives. And like anyone would do after a long day, they pause to look at a beautiful view. They sit down and look at Jerusalem and the Temple across from them. In two days...Jesus will be suffering and bearing the cup of God's wrath...the sins of the whole world.

**V3-4 Questions about the End**

The disciples ask when ‘these things’ will happen. ‘These things’ are not just the temple being torn down. The Zealots who incited the rebellion against Rome in AD 66 were religiously motivated...hoping the Messiah would come in the heat of battle over the temple (Edwards p390). They are thinking that Jesus’ army will intervene and set up God’s rule on earth. Matthew fills in the full questioning implied here (Matt 24:3) *and what will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age?* You can see they hope the Temple destruction is close to Jesus’ return after He rises again.

Jesus begins his answer with a personal warning...and He continues this several times throughout His long answer (called the Olivet Discourse).

### **V5-8 Watch Out for False Saviors**

(Blepete)

Jesus is concerned His disciples are in danger of being deceived. As was Mark for his readers. This is the trouble with being overzealous about eschatology. Holding on to hope in signs rather than continuing to know God. Jesus is placing first things first. How do we stop running ahead of God? How do we protect ourselves from being deceived?

### **Hand Illustration – firm grip**

Study the scriptures so you can correctly handle the word of truth (2 Tim

2:15). But we’re not alone in this. God sent the Holy Spirit...we can ask for help. Just don’t doubt He can give you wisdom. Jesus has given us teachers to help prepare us for service. And our obedience will bring the unity and maturity in Christ that God intended all along (Eph 4:11-13). I love to see believers gathered around God’s word...finding out His will and helping one another follow it.

Watch Out: Discern carefully who else God wants to speak into your life.

Especially those who don’t know you...out there in media land. They don’t know your uniqueness and gifting...the neighborhood you live in and what you do or how you think. *For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. 2 Tim 4:3*

Watch out for those who claim an authority that only belongs to Jesus. Or claim to have God’s new word (adding to Scripture or taking away). Some false teachers master audience control. And they speak just enough truth to get in your door before they slip in something that sounds good but is false...damaging to your relationship with God and His people. Even pastors with good intentions can become deceived into thinking they

are the ones called to save the church. Jesus is the Good Shepherd.

Here's a few Messiah claims from the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century:

### **Printout from Wikipedia**

Already in Paul's day there were people trying to fool the church into thinking that the Lord had returned. And they were using the authority of apostles. Paul's response is similar to Jesus but he also adds in another sign that we'll briefly touch on: *Don't be easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophesy, report or letter supposed to have come from us...Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, (and we will know him because) he will oppose and exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshipped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God.* (2 Thess 2:1-4)

Between Jesus' first and second coming there will be many antichrists: (those against Christ), who deny Jesus is the Son of God and deny He is returning in the flesh (1 John 2, 4; 2 Jn 7). This will go on until the ultimate Antichrist (Dan 7, 9, Mark 13:14, 2 Thess 2:1-12, Rev 6:2, Rev 13).

The Bible does not specifically say where he will come from or what race he will be. But we will know by his pride, blasphemies against God, the

power the world gives him to rule every tribe, people, language and nation. And all who do not belong to Jesus, will worship him (Rev 13:5-8). A foreshadow of this happened in the time of the Apostles...during Roman rule.

V7-8 Do not be alarmed...wars and rumors of wars must continue to happen in this fallen world of sin...so will natural disasters and famines. These signs are as true then as they are today.

Remember the Cuban missile crisis? The war in Iraq? We care, we pray, we help, we hope for peace...work for peace. But these are signs of the times. Many would have us believe the end is at the push of a button or invasion from another planet. God has other plans for the end. I thought it would be simple to document ongoing armed conflict in the world right now...but it's not. It's easier to list where there is no armed conflict. \_\_\_\_\_ So instead, I'll read to you about one...brought to my attention by our AGC national office.

**Greatest humanitarian crisis since WWII**  
These are the beginning of birth pains. Most of us would be familiar with the agonies it takes for a woman to give birth...and certainly only women know completely. In our day, there is much more to assist a woman with that pain...than the 1<sup>st</sup> century. Things like

drugs, doctors, nurses and a private air conditioned room. The Jews had long been using birthpangs as an illustration for the way they believed God would bring birth to His new world...the age to come. A Kingdom of justice, truth, peace and mercy. And especially when their world in Jesus' day seemed so cruel, they yearned for this future hope. Paul explains the whole creation has been groaning as in pains of childbirth right up to the present time waiting to be liberated by God (Rom 8:19-22)...and that is still true today. So the second set of signs are not really indications that Christ is returning any minute now but more like signs of the times...conflict, wars, natural disasters and famines. This is the age between Christ's first and second appearance. When birth is getting closer, birth pangs intensify and contractions come closer together.

Now Jesus moves back to a personal warning for His disciples.

### **V9-11 Be on Guard** (Blepete)

Persecution is the third set of future predictions by Christ. First was the temple destruction (v2), Second: False messiahs, wars, and natural disasters (v6-8). Believers will be personally attacked for their faith. All disciples need to take heed for themselves.

*Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life* (Prov 4:23). David

wisely prayed: *Search me, God, and now my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting* (Ps 139:23-24).

Peter says keep on growing. We can't stay on milk too long (1 Pet 1-2). We need meat, growth, faith stretching through service and self-discipline.

Paul says there is a huge war going on around us...not against flesh and blood. And we need to be ready with God's fully armor (Eph 6:10-18) and especially...pray. I mean strategically pray. Prayer that comes from devotion to God's word and being His ambassadors. God's will be done...advancing through enemy territory.

We know the apostles were treated just as Jesus describes here. I'm so thankful God inspired Luke to write Acts. We not only know the apostles were bullied, shamed, whipped, imprisoned and brought before high authorities (Acts 13:7, 18:12; 24; 25-26)...but we also know how God was with them all the way. Like when Paul and Silas are praising God with singing at midnight...thankful they were worthy to suffer for the name of Jesus (Acts 16:25). And this unnatural joy of God's presence through trial is still true today. We may not have personally experienced that level but we can

read or see testimonies from our brothers and sisters (ie Voice of the Martyres, Missionaries in Persecuted areas)

Inserted into all these warnings and ominous signs is a promise that stands alone among the persecutions: the Gospel to all nations. It follows that persecution actually spreads the Gospel. The Apostles will witness before governors and kings as part of God's plan to have the Gospel preached to all nations.

When did the Gospel begin to go out to all nations?

At Pentecost. Officially, next week is the day churches remember Pentecost but I'm going to remind us today. The apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit and Peter proclaimed the gospel to a huge crowd of Jews from all over the known world. These people each heard the Gospel in their own language...a miracle. And 3000 were baptised that day. God began the church of Jesus Christ. And Jesus' promise, 'you will do even greater things' began happening.

Did the Temple Destruction wait until every nation known at that time had been preached to? Even if it did, Christ charges His disciples to make disciples of all nations. That doesn't stop until we're done here. God's love continues to compel people to bring the Gospel to new people groups in our day. So

many Christians interpret this to be a promise about the return of Christ...for us to be a part of. The extreme view is that we can force God's hand by getting the Gospel everywhere. This is God's story...for us to participate in, not the other way around.

I think we have a lot of growing up to do when it comes to persecutions. Myself included. I do not welcome them. We stand afar...watching. Will we stand that test if it comes here? I say yes by the promise of God to sustain as He has and will always. The testimony of scriptures and suffering believers all through the ages says it will make us stronger.

V11...don't worry about what to say. This last section again is specific for the disciples. The New Testament had not been written. It is not an excuse for being unstudied but an assurance. It give us peace about the results. I believe the Holy Spirit can give us what to say...speak through us. There have been times where I said just the right thing at just the right time...and it was words given to me. But we need to be in the Word...I urge daily. To be transformed in our minds and know God's will. God's Spirit brings to mind the Word we have hidden in our heart.

**V12-13 Stand Firm**



Again, this was very real for the believers of the 1<sup>st</sup> century. And it continues to ring true especially where changing faiths is punishable by banishment or death among family. I know even in BC, there are people in fear of their lives or being completely shut out from all family support...by believing in Jesus. Loyalty to Jesus will separate families. This is the hardest persecution. Let us pray for those who face anger, hatred and harm from family for following Jesus. The Jew who said 'Jesus is Lord' were considered blaspheming...worthy of death. It fits that 'everyone'...the Gentiles and the Jews hated the first Christians.

V13b *But the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.* This is the doctrine of perseverance. Jesus also warned about the seed that lands in the rocky soil...people who's faith only lasts a short time...when trouble comes they quickly fall away and bear no fruit (Mk 4:16ff). The doctrine of security in Christ is also true so these are held in tension. That is why new believers need assurance of their new identity in Christ and that God will never leave them. As they grow stronger in their faith, God expects them to join the kingdom adventure. It would be a huge waste and frankly a big embarrassment at the judgement, to coast along never growing and

investing in the kingdom...counting on a childhood spark of faith. Jesus said abide...remain in me (Jn 15). This all falls under the doctrine of sanctification. Growing to maturity in Christ. Here's a word of encouragement about suffering for Christ.

*Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.* 1 Peter 4:12-14

We're only through the first section, but already the disciples must be getting a sense that the fulfillment of their hopes is not going to happen in a few days. And not all at once. Yet sooner than they realize, they will experience a peace and joy – related to their hope in Christ – beyond their imaginations.

*What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived" — the things God has prepared for those who love him* 1 Cor 2:9  
Before Jesus ascended into heaven, He told His disciples to wait for the Baptism of the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem. They met again, and the disciples asked if this was also the

time for restoring the kingdom to Israel (it's been less than 40 days since He rose again). Jesus reminded them that it was not for them to know the times or dates the Father has set. The mission is to be God's witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

(Acts 1:4-8). That should keep us on a mission too.

The disciples don't get it yet...but most of them will, that the highest view is from the cross to the empty tomb to the fields ripe for harvest. And so today we find from Jesus how to live till the end of the age:

- Alert for false saviors
- Not sounding the 'end of the world' alarm at every calamity (birth pains)
- Guarding our Heart so we're faithful through persecution...even from family

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before Him He endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. <sup>3</sup> Consider Him who endured such opposition from sinners,*

*so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.* Hebrews 12:1-3