

Vigilant

Mark 13:24-37

Do you find some sections of Bible prophesy confusing sometimes? In the OT, God gave the law to Israel but it was also necessary to give them direction for specific situations. That's where the prophets come in. Don't get too discouraged when you feel like an outsider...because we weren't there. The key is to find that which helps you know God's character, purpose and will.

A common theme for OT prophets is a future deliverance. They paint a picture of a Messiah (in the line of David). This Messiah will save His people from their sins that they may be righteous before God. The Messiah will establish an eternal kingdom of God on earth. This will also be a day of reckoning with God (Day of the Lord)...the entire cosmos shakes before God Almighty Judgement. We will encounter this today.

From reading Mark, we can see that the Jews in Jesus' day thought the Messiah would deal with their sin, save them from their enemies and set up His kingdom to rule the earth...all at once. They also had more of a political general in mind. Isaiah wrote most clearly against this political notion and focused on the suffering Servant who pays the ransom for their

sins...rejected, abused and killed...but who will reign in triumph after. Jesus is the one promised who would be like Moses. Yet He is much more (Heb 3:1-6): priest, prophet and king Messiah, all in one. And we need to be reminded that Jesus is returning as King. In Mark 13, Jesus is wearing the prophet hat...speaking to specific future circumstances. He stands in the middle prophesy fulfillment (hundreds and thousands of years before) and shares God's continuing plan of salvation and triumph. And because of the 'mountain range effect' no one knows when the next part of the plan for deliverance will happen. No one except the Father. We just know that God is faithful all the way.

How are you holding out...waiting for Jesus to return?

Do you still talk about it? Dream about it? Confused? Doubtful?

I have a collection of Gospel tracts. So I thought I'd look through a few...just to see if they mention Christ's return. I tried 10 and none of them mentioned Christ's return. Could there be a connection between weak followership and leaving Christ's return on the backburner in our Gospel?

Pray

Jesus has warned the disciples to flee if they're near Jerusalem at the final signs of its destruction (Abomination). And this also ignites warnings about the disciple's second question...the end times:

- Dreadful days unequalled (cut short for the sake of the elect)
- False messiahs/prophets with signs to deceive the church.

Jesus now continues to prophesy forward in time...following that distress

Read V24-27 The Real Messiah

At the end of the great distress (tribulation) is cosmic catastrophe (our galaxy darkening and falling). Our house insurance used to describe events out of our control as 'acts of God'. Never talked about stars falling and shaking. Is this description symbolic or real? Jesus is drawing from the later prophets Isa (13:10), Ezek (32:7-8) and Joel (2:10, 31; 3:15) about the great and dreadful day of the Lord, when God "will punish the world for its evil (Is 13:11)."

And why hasn't He already done this by now?

God is patiently waiting for those who will be saved (2 Pet 3:8-9). When God's time is right for judgement, the whole world will see it and mourn. Most see this as symbolic, just as it was used to declare Babylon's fall...which happened in 539BC. But consider the

sky was darkened in the middle of the day when Jesus died. So ominous, one of hardened Roman soldiers exclaimed: "Surely this was the Son of God (Mk 15:39)." Our scientists would say Jesus' description would mean the earth's end. But who is in control of every molecule right now?

all things have been created through him (the Son) and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. Col 1:17

That's king Jesus!

Day of the Lord is accompanied by the most wondrously joyful sight for believers: the Son of Man coming in the clouds. The Shekinah Glory of the Lord – like at Mt Sinai, the tabernacle in the wilderness, Solomon's temple, Saul..on the road to Damascus. Three of the disciples experienced it and fell down, terrified (Matt 17:6). (Angels will remind the disciples about this again when Jesus ascends (Acts 1:11).)

The Great Gathering

Jesus had legions of angels at His disposal while He was being punished for our sins. He could have stopped it anytime. At His return, the Lord will use their services to gather His people from everywhere...heaven and earth. And we find in 1 Thess 4 15-17, that the Lord will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And this is the order in which

people will rise to meet Christ in the clouds: those already dead in the body go first, and those still living on earth at the time go second...to be with Lord always. Those believers living at the time *“will be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet* (1 Cor 15:51-51) The faithful dead will be raised incorruptible: all of us with immortal bodies.

Death is swallowed up in victory! (15:54) Pretty vital information in our Gospel, isn't it?

Or perhaps we have become intimidated by the scoffers:

Read 2 Pet 3:3-7

Peter goes on to describe another Day of the Lord that will come like a thief. But this day is when the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it laid bare (white throne judgement, Rev 20). God makes a new heaven and a new earth (3:13, Rev 21)...our final home with God.

And what purpose does judgement and end times warnings serve?

It leads to a question: What kind of people ought we to be?

Peter gives this answer: You ought to live holy and godly lives as you wait eagerly for the day of God to come. And again, “make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with Him (v14).

Sounds impossible. It is...by our own strength. This is where we have to

exercise our faith in how God sees us now. And how we can go on to what He has prepared for us in advance to do (Eph 2:10).

Read Romans 8:1-4, 14-17

We need to balance the holiness writings of Peter with the assurance of sonship. So we can experience God's love, motivation and power to live for Him. Godliness is possible for the believer because we are under God's grace. By faith we can deny our nature to sin...because we know we belong to God. And Christ is already there by His Spirit to guide us to the right thoughts and actions.

We are being warned not to forget our first love. *Be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of the lawless and fall from your secure position* (2 Pet 3:17 and Rev 2:4-5).

Stop loving God first, and we're headed very quickly in the wrong direction...the direction the Pharisees were headed when they saw Jesus as an agent of Satan. The amazing thing we have in Christ, is that God's grace is there from start to finish. Convicting us, opening our spiritual eyes, giving Christ as the ransom and giving us the Holy Spirit to live in grace for Him. On top of that, rewarding us forever...when it is all by His power. Believe and obey...deny the selfish way. What else can we be but a humble thankful, loving people?

Jesus doesn't leave His disciples imagining that triumphant moment. He brings their focus right back on the ground...a fig tree. It was the Monday after His kingly entrance to Jerusalem, that Jesus found a fig tree that was in full leaf...but fruitless. Just like the temple was advertising it was bustling with activity...yet had become a den of robbers instead of a place of prayer...fruitless. Jesus cursed that tree and then walked to the hub of the temple and pronounced God's judgement on it. The fig tree withered...dying within a day. Now we will find out when the buildings and walls of the temple will be thrown down (Mk 13:2).

V28-31 Proof within a Generation

Has Jesus made a mistake? Or do we need a closer look? My choice of interpretation is that Jesus is back to addressing the disciple's first question about the temple knocked down. The cues I am drawing from are:

1. Back to the fig tree, which previously had been used to describe the temple
2. the move from 'those days' (v24) to 'these things'(v29). Which would be: Temple torn down, false messiahs, birth pangs (humans and earth in upheaval), persecution, gospel preached to all nations, abomination. It's a difficult passage to interpret. I refuse to believe

Jesus is making a mistake, and the phrase 'this generation' is clear from context and Bible use. So there must be a limit on "all these things."

3. We also have the advantage of knowing how Jesus' prediction played out: Jerusalem and the Temple were completely destroyed 40 years later...one biblical generation (i.e. Israelites wandering in the desert for one generation = 40 years). And despite rumors circulated to confuse some in the early church, Jesus has not returned to set up God's kingdom.

Not only did Jesus prediction about the temple being utterly destroyed come true...so did His prediction about the timing of its demise. Christ's words will outlive heaven (Heb 13:8). The season was indeed right at the door, when you consider when Jesus was speaking, there had been a Temple in Jerusalem for about 1000 years before Christ (except for the interruption of less than 100 years because of Babylon). After one generation, the temple remains completely desolate and in its place is an Islamic shrine (Dome of the Rock) has stood since 691 AD. May God protect us from our places of worship becoming such.

The Temple Destruction now serves us as a pattern or sign of God's

judgement on the world to come. Evil powers on the rise, Christians being deceived (prosperity gospel, signs and wonders movement etc.), and strong birth pangs of world calamities (human conflict and natural disasters). Yet even in the approaching darkness, light becomes brighter! Amen?

We move back into a statement about the end, signaled by the phrase 'that day' which coordinates with 'those days' in v17, 19, 20 and 24.

V32-37 Ready Anytime

Jesus here admits to complete obedience to the Father's will. Humble in confidence...like His humility to take on human limitation. Yes, it is a mystery how God is one yet the Son does not know this detail. And many have strayed since the 2nd century...making Christ less than the Father (Arians). What we need to build on is that Jesus' relationship with the Father is everything. He accepts His human limitations and trusts the Father. And the good news for us is because of Jesus, we can cry out in distress to God, our Father, too. No one knows the time of God's judgement and Christ's Coming to gather His people. I warned the last two sermons about over-speculation. And especially not judging others and causing divisions over details that do not jeopardize anything Jesus has said or what the bible teaches about God,

His character and will. Be eagle-eyed about possible danger to your faith.

Jesus ends the Olivet discourse with a mini Parable. Remember, a parable is an illustration. Jesus hasn't left us in charge. He sent His Spirit to live in us. We are servant ambassadors. Back to the story: this man of wealth goes away without giving a specific time for his return. And leaves his servants with their assigned tasks. There's is an old saying, "When the cat is away, the mice will play". What's to keep the servants on task?

The suspense that the master could return anytime.

Better be ready. The master expects everything to be in order and the house ready for celebration when he comes back. How much warning can the watchman give? Not enough time to scramble at the last minute to complete all that is expected. You can't suddenly make crops grow and rethatch a roof or use up the provisions to cook while the master is away. Bribes and blackmail will only go so far...the truth will come out. Remember the parable of the talents. The one who didn't venture out and invest the master's money (fearfully buried it) infuriated the master and he was cast out into the outer darkness (Matt 25:14-30). The point is, God has given us assignments till Christ

returns...wonderful opportunities that count for eternity. And what will motivate us to stay faithful?

Jesus will return anytime.

Be Vigilant! Keep Watch for Christ's Return. Our Lord's approval is our motivation...as His humble, thankful servants.

We will wait upon the Lord!

Confident...expecting trouble but expecting also to meet Him at the great gathering (or sooner if we perish from here). Trusting our lives into

God's hands (Ps 62:1, rom 5:5). is not easy...otherwise everyone would be doing it. It calls for faith in the face of human weakness (Ps 69, My eyes fail, looking

for my God). It calls for humility - dependent on God's way and timing ("thy will be done" Matt 6:10). It calls for patience - (Lord, I need patience...right now!)

It calls for obedience - to endure till the end (Mk 13:13).

This sounds like a life of white-knuckled work and determination. And until you are born of the Spirit, it will be that. And even many who've had a taste of freedom...try to take back control and live defeated lives. Remember the seeds and the soils? Three quarters of the people don't really produce crops for God. Still mostly controlled by their sin nature...feelings and urges, rather than faith, God's word, prayer and His

community. Faithful perseverance has great merit:

Building the character God wants in us
(James 1:4, Rom 5:3)

Boosting our faith - because God will prove to be faithful

Rest for the soul...even in the presence of our enemies (Ps 23)

Confidence - Exchanging our weakness for God's strength (2 Cor 12:9) He answers our prayers according to His will (1 Jn 5:14)

but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength.

They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint. Is 40:31

Take heart, We are not the only one's waiting. The whole creation waits (Rom 8:19) And our vigilance encourages others, also.

Amen?

May our Gospel sharing include the return of King Jesus.