

This morning, we are in the sixteenth week of a sermon series I am calling “Savior and Lord,” looking at what it means to relate to Jesus as both Savior – the one who died for our sins to give us eternal life – and Lord – the one who we follow and emulate. We are working our way through Mark’s gospel in this series. Mark was Peter’s traveling companion, and the Gospel of Mark is mainly Peter’s eyewitness testimony of Jesus (Peter was first known as Simon before Jesus changed his name). We are up to Mark 13, and Jesus is nearing the end of the road. This past week, he has been in temple, teaching and engaging in arguments with religious leaders who are determined to see him killed. This chapter that we are on today is what most would agree is the **most confusing chapter** in the whole book, as it deals with Jesus talking about events which had not yet happened – the destruction of the temple, the fall of Jerusalem, and then eventually his own second coming. Let’s begin reading in Mark 13.

**Mark 13:1-37** - *As he was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!"<sup>2</sup> "Do you see all these great buildings?" replied Jesus. "Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down."<sup>3</sup> As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John and Andrew asked him privately,<sup>4</sup> "Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?"<sup>5</sup> Jesus said to them: "Watch out that no one deceives you.<sup>6</sup> Many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and will deceive many.<sup>7</sup> When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come.<sup>8</sup> Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains.<sup>9</sup> "You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them.<sup>10</sup> And the gospel must first be preached to all nations.<sup>11</sup> Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.<sup>12</sup> "Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death.<sup>13</sup> All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.<sup>14</sup> "When you see 'the abomination that causes desolation' standing where it does not belong-- let the reader understand-- then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.<sup>15</sup> Let no one on the roof of his house go down or enter the house to take anything out.<sup>16</sup> Let no one in the field go back to get his cloak.<sup>17</sup> How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers!<sup>18</sup> Pray that this will not take place in winter,<sup>19</sup> because those will be days of distress unequalled from the beginning, when God created the world, until*

now-- and never to be equaled again. <sup>20</sup> If the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would survive. But for the sake of the elect, whom he has chosen, he has shortened them. <sup>21</sup> At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'Look, there he is!' do not believe it. <sup>22</sup> For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and miracles to deceive the elect-- if that were possible. <sup>23</sup> So be on your guard; I have told you everything ahead of time. <sup>24</sup> "But in those days, following that distress, "the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; <sup>25</sup> the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.' <sup>26</sup> "At that time men will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. <sup>27</sup> And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens. <sup>28</sup> "Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. <sup>29</sup> Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door. <sup>30</sup> I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. <sup>31</sup> Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. <sup>32</sup> "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. <sup>33</sup> Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. <sup>34</sup> It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with his assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch. <sup>35</sup> "Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back-- whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. <sup>36</sup> If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. <sup>37</sup> What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!'"

Like I said, this is a confusing chapter. Whenever the focus is about future events, it can be challenging to understand, especially because in Biblical prophecy there are often multiple fulfillments predicted in one passage. There are a few different approaches to understanding this passage out there, but I think the best way to read this is to see **v. 1-31 as Jesus answering the question raised by the disciples in v. 4 about when the temple will be destroyed and what signs will anticipate that event.** Then in v. 32-37, Jesus gives a brief discussion about his second coming, an event which of course is still yet to occur. However, even saying that, verses 1-31 could possibly have sections that, while they are primarily fulfilled when the temple is destroyed in 70 AD, are also relevant to Jesus' second coming. **However you look at it, it has a lot to teach us about how we are to look at the future.** So let me try to explain what I think this passage means, and then what it means for us today.

*As he was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!" <sup>2</sup> "Do you see all these great*

*buildings?" replied Jesus. "Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down."*

Verses 1-2 link us with the previous section. Jesus has departed the temple, and as one of the disciples marvels at it, Jesus tells him that the temple will be destroyed. This destruction of the temple and the city of Jerusalem happened in 70 AD, when the Romans set fire to the temple and tore it down. The disciples follow up in verses 3-4 by asking him when the temple will be destroyed and what the signs are.

You can divide Jesus' response up into four sections.

### Section 1 – 5-8 –

*<sup>5</sup> Jesus said to them: "Watch out that no one deceives you. <sup>6</sup> Many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and will deceive many. <sup>7</sup> When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. <sup>8</sup> Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains.*

Jesus begins the answer by naming some things that are not the signs of impending doom: wars, rumors of wars, earthquakes, and famines. He tells them not to panic when those happen, that war and natural disaster are just a part of life. They are not signs of the end. And he tells them to watch out for those who try to deceive you into thinking they are the Messiah, or that they are the Messiah. Again, while he is answering their question about the fall of the temple, I believe this is relevant. Wars, rumors of wars, earthquakes, etc. are just part of life in this world. They are the birth pains, so to speak, before finally there will be a new earth.

### Section 2 – 9-13

*<sup>9</sup> "You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them. <sup>10</sup> And the gospel must first be preached to all nations. <sup>11</sup> Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit. <sup>12</sup> "Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. <sup>13</sup> All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.*

In verses 9-13, he tells them that they will face persecution as they spread the gospel. This of course is a common theme

*Matthew 5:10-12 - Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. <sup>11</sup> "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

In verse 10, Jesus says that before the temple is destroyed, the gospel must first go out beyond Jerusalem to all the nations. The good news for Israel must become the good news for the Gentiles as well. But while you are preaching the gospel, there will be persecution. Many of you will be arrested, and even your families may hate you and kill you. But do not worry – the Lord will tell you what to speak. Stand firm to the end and you will be saved.

Once again, this is a passage that has relevance to today. We are still tasked with preaching the gospel to all the nations, to every people group. And as we do it, there will be resistance and persecution.

### Section 3 – 14-23

<sup>14</sup> "When you see 'the abomination that causes desolation' standing where it does not belong-- let the reader understand-- then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. <sup>15</sup> Let no one on the roof of his house go down or enter the house to take anything out. <sup>16</sup> Let no one in the field go back to get his cloak. <sup>17</sup> How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! <sup>18</sup> Pray that this will not take place in winter, <sup>19</sup> because those will be days of distress unequalled from the beginning, when God created the world, until now-- and never to be equaled again. <sup>20</sup> If the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would survive. But for the sake of the elect, whom he has chosen, he has shortened them. <sup>21</sup> At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'Look, there he is!' do not believe it. <sup>22</sup> For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and miracles to deceive the elect-- if that were possible. <sup>23</sup> So be on your guard; I have told you everything ahead of time.

Now Jesus begins to get specific. Before the temple falls, he says that there will be a terrible abomination that will cause people to flee from the temple. This is the language of Daniel 9:27

**Daniel 9:27** - *He will confirm a covenant with many for one 'seven.' In the middle of the 'seven' he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on a wing of the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him."*

In 1 Maccabees 1:54, which is an apocryphal book not included in the Bible, there is record of the first fulfillment of this, when the Seleucid King Antiochus IV Epiphanes conquered Jerusalem and forbade circumcision and the offering of sacrifices. He erected a statue of Zeus and set up a brothel in the temple. They abandoned the temple.

Now Jesus says that something terrible will be happening again in the temple. Guesses as to what that was – In AD 67, Jews permitted criminals to enter the Holy of Holies, and they committed murders in temple. Whatever it was, Jesus he tells them that when that happens, they need to run! Flee! Do not hold on to the temple or put your hope in it. Don't believe the false Christs and prophets. They will want you to rebel against Rome, but they will be destroyed, and the temple will be destroyed too. Josephus talks of a false prophet who proclaimed that God had commanded them to go up to the temple court in order to receive their tokens of deliverance, but they were killed by the Romans.

#### Section 4 – 24-31

<sup>24</sup> *"But in those days, following that distress, "the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; <sup>25</sup> the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.' <sup>26</sup> "At that time men will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. <sup>27</sup> And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens. <sup>28</sup> "Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. <sup>29</sup> Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door. <sup>30</sup> I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. <sup>31</sup> Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.*

This is apocalyptic language. It's not literal. The language is meant to illustrate that there will be a cosmic shaking, that these are earth-shattering events. In the OT, such language is used when nations are falling, it times of great shaking and political change within world history. Two main changes are taking place here. Authority will no longer be in the people of Israel and the temple, but in Jesus, the Son of Man, and an international people of God.

**Matthew 12:6** - *I tell you that one greater than the temple is here.*

It's not a Parousia prediction, but the emphasis is on the enthronement of Jesus, the Son of God, and the far-reaching political change. He is not just gathering the Jewish exiles, but a people from all corners of the earth. And all of this will happen before this generation passes away. When you see these signs, you know that the time of the destruction of the temple is near. His words are reliable.

**Isaiah 40:7-8** - *The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the LORD blows on them. Surely the people are grass. <sup>8</sup> The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever."*

The bottom line is that in this section, he is speaking to fall of Jerusalem and the temple, but there are echoes of his second coming, with the preaching of the gospel to all the nations, the persecution, the man of lawlessness opposing God's people, the ultimate enthronement of Jesus, and the gathering of the elect from all the world.

### Section 5 – 32-37

<sup>32</sup> "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. <sup>33</sup> Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. <sup>34</sup> It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with his assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch. <sup>35</sup> "Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back-- whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. <sup>36</sup> If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. <sup>37</sup> What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!'"

In this section, Jesus transitions to the end times. His main message is this: Don't try to figure out the dates. Just be alert and keep watch.

What does this mean for us?

#### 1) Have a balanced view of the end times.

On the one hand, don't think he's not returning, just because it hasn't happened yet:

**2 Peter 3:8-11** - *But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. <sup>9</sup> The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. <sup>10</sup> But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. <sup>11</sup> Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives*

On the other hand, don't try to figure out end times events. Some love end times speculation, others don't. Just be faithful to sharing the gospel with all nations and be vigilant, living holy and godly lives as you await his return.

## 2) Stay faithful to Jesus to the end

Keep preaching the gospel and stay faithful to Jesus. There will be many false Messiahs trying to take you away from the true gospel.

**Galatians 1:6-9** - *I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel-- <sup>7</sup> which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. <sup>8</sup> But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be **eternally condemned!** <sup>9</sup> As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be **eternally condemned!***

We may not know when it ends, but we do know that God will triumph. In the meantime, we are to be faithful to Jesus in preaching the gospel to all nations.

**Acts 1:6-8** - *So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" <sup>7</sup> He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. <sup>8</sup> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*

## 3) Expect suffering and persecution

Don't be surprised by it.

*John 16:33 - "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."*

This is why it is baffling that so many people fall for the lies of the health and wealth preachers that tell you that if you are following God, it's all going to come up roses for you. No – Jesus says again and again that you can expect suffering. But remain faithful to the end, keeping your eyes on Him, and you will be saved.

We do not know what exactly the future will bring, or when it will happen, but we know that Jesus has told us to remain faithful to Him and to continue preaching the gospel everywhere we go until He returns.