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Concerning Jesus - Mark 13 ~Aaron McRae

This Discussion Guide is designed to help you **think more deeply** about the sermon and **engage with others** through thoughtful conversation, biblical exploration and **allow God to work** in your life as you apply what you discover.

➤ CONVERSATION STARTER

What is your favorite time of day? Why?

What is your favorite season? Winter, Spring, Summer or Fall. Why?

➤ EXPLORATION

There is a lot going on in the world around us. We have access to 24-hour news, filled with stories and images that are disturbing. Some of the information we receive is from credible sources but much of it is not. It is no wonder that there is an epidemic of anxiety, fear and worry in our world today.

In Mark chapter 13 Jesus is calling us to live a life of trust and not of fear. It is important to note that this is a passage that has been debated by many scholars for thousands of years. Our goal here is not to settle those debates, but instead to focus on the heart of the passage. Jesus is telling us how to live a life of faith even in difficult times.

Mark 13:1-5 (From your bible, read aloud)

During the time of Jesus' ministry there was a lot of construction going on. The Roman ruler, Herod was

known for his incredible construction projects. He built magnificent structures, including the lavish temple where the Jewish people worshiped.

Jesus warned the disciples that the temple would one day be destroyed. In verse 5, Jesus warns them to watch out so that no one would deceive them. He gives many warnings like this in the book of Mark.

Warnings to "Watch Out" or "Be Aware" in Mark 13

- Things are not always as they seem (vs. 2)
- There are many trying to deceive you (vs. 5)
- We need to be ready for trouble (vs. 9)
- Jesus prepares them ahead (vs. 23)
- Prayer helps us be aware (vs. 33)

There is a big difference between being "aware" and being "afraid." Jesus wants the disciples to be aware and prepared for the kinds of things that would eventually happen in the world. He didn't want them to be surprised.

Mark 13:6-8 (From your bible, read aloud)

How do these verses help you put into perspective the current events in our world?

When we hear about terrible things happening in our world, Jesus invites us to remember that God knows exactly what is happening. We can trust God to guide us through any circumstance we face.

Mark 13:14-19 (From your bible, read aloud)

This is where controversy and disagreement begins to creep into interpretation of the scriptures. People may become distracted by wondering "when" and "how" and "what" Jesus is specifically describing.

Over the centuries, scholars have debated what is being described in this passage. Was it about the destruction of the temple? Was it about the Roman siege on Jerusalem in AD70? Was this describing something that has not happened yet?

We are not going to focus on debating the details of what is being described. We will focus on what Jesus wants us to do when troubles come. He wanted his disciples (including us) to be alert and to be ready to respond with faith and with confidence.

Why do you think people get caught up in speculation over these verses?

Mark 13:32-33 (From your bible, read aloud)

There was so much uncertainty during the time of Jesus' ministry and there is so much uncertainty in our world today. We never know when trouble will come. This can be a source of great anxiety for people, but that is not what Jesus wants for his people. We can have hope.

Jesus tells us to be on guard and to be alert. The King James Version says, "take heed, watch and pray." He is calling us to be discerning and to understand that there will be dark days ahead and we should not be surprised. Instead, we need to be awake and alert.

We don't just sit back and ignore what is going on around us because we feel powerless. Jesus tells the disciples to be wakeful, not listless. Be ready, not resting. Don't be lazy when it is time to be watching.

This kind of passive posture is sometimes described as "languishing." According to Adam Grant, languishing is the neglected middle child of mental health. It's the void between depression and flourishing. A person experiencing this doesn't have the symptoms of mental illness, but they are not the picture of mental health either.

7 Signs You May Be Languishing

- 1 Difficulty concentrating
- 2 Lack of excitement
- 3 Joylessness
- 4 Aimlessness
- 5 Decreased motivation
- 6 Difficulty in maintaining focus
- 7 Reduced work engagement

(Adam Grant, New York Times Article 2021)

Which if any of these signs describes an area that is challenging for you?

Jesus calls his followers to be on guard, to be prayerful and to be alert. We are not to be caught up by speculation about what is happening in the world. Instead, we are to be grounded in God's word and in prayer.

*"And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, **be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.**"* Ephesians 6:18

Mark 13:33-37 (From your bible, read aloud)

If you knew that you only had one week to live, how would you spend that week?

We do not know when Jesus will return, and that's OK. Our job is to be alert and to follow Jesus faithfully. We are called to be vigilant in carrying out our responsibilities to be loving, serving and caring all the way to the very end.

➤ TAKE AWAY

Jesus prepared the disciples for the hardships they would face. His words are just as relevant today. He calls us to be alert and to live our lives in accordance with his commands:

'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' Mark 12:30

'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these.' Mark 12:31

When we choose to live our lives faithfully, keeping our love for God and for our neighbor as our top priority, we can be confident that we are ready no matter what happens.

What practical step can you take this week to be more watchful and alert to the things of God?

Pray together, asking God to help you make loving God and loving your neighbor your first and most important priority this week.