

Series: **Gospel of Mark**
Today's Title: **"Jesus Reveals the Future"**
February 28, 2021 – *Mark 13:1-37* (Also: Matthew 24-25 Luke 21:5-36)

Objective: To help people know that God is sovereign over history and to be ready for His return.

Prayer

Bad news sells. It seems we find bad news and crisis - problems - scandal - more interesting than good news. No matter what news you watch, most of what you'll see are stories about bad news - problems - something not right.

On the flip side of that reality is the idea of utopia. Merriam Webster defines utopia as *a place of ideal perfection especially in laws, government, and social conditions.*

There are some people who believe we (global humanity) can achieve utopia - if we just work harder - get the right people in government and get the right form of government in place. If we do these things, we can solve all the world's problems and live in a utopian reality.

But Jesus would disagree with that outlook of the future. In our passage today Jesus reveals the future - reveals what will happen to the world in the future.

Turn to Mark 13:1-37

After silencing His critics / enemies by His question to them about the Messiah being David's son, and after watching

people put their money into the Temple treasury, Jesus and His disciples walk out of the city, and that's where Mark begins chapter 13.

Read 13:1-2

The destruction of the Jerusalem temple. vs. 1-2

The unnamed disciple was impressed with the appearance of the Temple.

Granted, the Temple was a magnificent structure - one of the wonders of the ancient world.

But Jesus saw past the impressive and beautiful appearance and He saw the outward beauty of the Temple as nothing more than a façade - a fake front hiding the empty spiritual busyness inside.

A fig tree with nothing but leaves! (11:13)

Jesus makes a prediction - a prophecy - that the glorious buildings of the Temple would be completely destroyed.

[Pics of large stones - temple mount]

The magnificent stones would be toppled and “thrown down”.

Talk about throwing cold water on someone!!!

Nostalgia and national pride were no doubt mixed in with the disciple's comment about the glory of the Temple - but Jesus goes to the opposite end of the spectrum and shares the reality of future events.

Remember, they rightly believed Jesus was the Messiah / Christ - and they believed the Messiah would be a military and political leader who would defeat the Romans and restore Israel's greatness and prominence in the world.

But Jesus crushes their Messianic expectations and reveals a great tragedy and defeat for Israel - and specifically for Jerusalem and the Temple.

Read vs. 3

Jesus and these 4 disciples find a place to sit down on the Mount of Olives - which is a bit higher elevation than the Temple - a short walk across the Kidron Valley.

[Mount of Olive pics - view of Temple]

From this beautiful vantage point - Jesus gives what's referred to as His *Olivet Discourse* - because He is on the Mount of Olives when He reveals details of the future with His disciples.

The first thing Jesus reveals is:

Events during the time of Christ and the early Church. vs. 3-13

Read vs. 4-13

The 4 disciples (Peter, Andrew, James, John - 2 sets of brothers) ask Jesus 2 questions:

1. When will these things happen?
2. What will be the sign that precedes them?

In answer to these 2 questions, Jesus gives a long answer - His longest answer to any question recorded in the Gospels.

The key words / phrases in His answer:

“don’t be led astray” - vs. 5

“be on your guard” - vs. 9, 23, 33

“keep awake” - vs. 33

“stay awake” - vs. 35, 37

A key interpretive clue in the Bible is repetition - so whenever you see repetition - you should take notice. Even though this is not the same word repeated 7X, it is the same idea repeated 7X in these 37 verses.

There is a fine line between ‘being alert’ / ‘on guard’ / ‘staying awake’ - and being paranoid and fearful.

Jesus is not encouraging us to be fearful or paranoid.

On the contrary.

As we read through this teaching, our thoughts must be covered with the reality of God’s sovereign control over history.

Once again, Jesus is proving / displaying His deity by revealing what the future holds - something only God can do.

As frightening and awful as some of these events are, God is using every one of them to accomplish His mission - for His glory.

The destruction of the Temple Jesus predicts occurred in 70 A.D. - about 40 years after this teaching.

What He reveals and describes in vs. 3-13 are events which will take place before and after 70 A.D.

They are events which will happen to Jesus' followers - which of course include His disciples / Apostles.

When you are living in a time of war - famine - natural disasters (earthquakes & famines - vs. 8), it is often overwhelming.

The calamity and terror of those times often feels so intense and massive that it's natural for us to think the end is near - that it can't get any worse.

But it will.

Jesus says (vs. 8b), "These are the beginning of birth pains."

It's always dangerous for a man to talk as if he knows about the intensity of birth pains...

But when a woman is in the very beginning of labor, the pain is intense, but not nearly as intense or frequent as it will be when it's time to give birth.

He uses this illustration of birth pains to give some historical perspective to these events.

- Jesus warns of others who will claim to be the Messiah.
- He tells His disciples they will be tortured ("flogged in the synagogues - vs. 9). This would be from the Jews.

- They would stand before “governors and kings as witnesses to them.” (vs. 9)
- The Gospel would be preached to all nations.
- He warns of family betrayal (vs. 12).
- He tells of the world’s hatred for His followers (vs. 13).

Utopia?

Hardly.

The world will not tolerate Jesus or His followers - Christians.

Of course, throughout history this intolerance and hatred would see times of intensity, and times of passive indifference. But don’t be deceived - or think the world will embrace Jesus.

Why not?

Because Satan is the *‘prince of this world’*.

John 12:31

“Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out.”

2 Corinthians 4:4

“the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”

The Apostles - and the Christians in the early Church would endure horrific persecution and world events would cast a dark shadow through wars and natural disasters.

Jesus reveals future events and details of tribulation. vs. 14-23

Biblical prophecy often has what's called a '*near fulfillment*' and a '*far fulfillment*'.

'*Near*' - because it's referring to something that will occur closer to the time the prophecy was given.

'*Far*' - because the same prophecy has a double-meaning. It's pointing to something chronologically close - and something else off in the future - possibly centuries away.

Another way to say this is it refers to something which is already historical from our perspective - and to something yet future.

Also, it's important to remember that Jesus is giving an overview - a snapshot of the past 2,000 years of world history - and it may include many more years yet to come.

Some who read these passages in the Bible try and 'connect the dots' - they try and assign what Jesus says to specific events in world history - or certain countries and rulers in world history.

That can certainly be fascinating - and interesting - but it often turns out to be wrong - or at best, something we can't know for sure - and we're left with a great deal of speculation.

As we read through this chapter, the key points to remember are:

1. God's sovereign control of world history.
2. We need to be alert and watchful (not paranoid or fearful) as we live for Christ, so we won't be shaken or fall away from Christ when difficulties come.

Read vs. 14-23

One of the big ideas Jesus is sharing is that the world will not improve - but it will devolve into a world with increasing levels of dysfunction, pain and suffering.

Some Christians have a belief which says we will evangelize the world to the point that so many people will believe in Jesus - and as people live obedient lives to Christ the world will improve - and it will improve so dramatically that the Kingdom of God will be ushered in by the goodness that dominates the world.

This is a belief called ***Post Millennialism***.

They believe this great evangelistic expansion will lead to a "*golden age of spiritual prosperity with uplifted social, economic, political and cultural life.*"

(<https://www.christianity.com/wiki/end-times/what-is-postmillennialism.html>)

Some well-known adherents have been: John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield.

But history tells a different story.

According to a July 2003 article in the NY Times:

“Of the past 3,400 years, humans have been entirely at peace for 268 of them, or just 8 percent of recorded history. At least 108 million people were killed in wars in the twentieth century. Estimates for the total number killed in wars throughout all of human history range from 150 million to 1 billion.”

(<https://www.nytimes.com/2003/07/06/books/chapters/what-every-person-should-know-about-war.html>)

“From 755 to 763, a period of time of the great war in China - 36 million people died.

In the Mongol conquest in the 13th century, 30 to 60 million; 20 million in World War I.

In World War II, 72 million people died.

Since 1985 up until recently, almost a half a million people have died every year in war.”

(<https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/41-66/the-grim-reality-of-the-last-days>)

The Messiah did not lead a revolt against Rome - and lead an Israeli return to glory.

The opposite happened.

By divine judgment, God used Rome to judge Israel - Roman troops destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 A.D. - killing thousands of Jews in the process.

In the 1st century as the Church grew and spread across the world - converting millions of people from paganism to faith in Christ as a result of the early Church's embrace of the Great Commission, those Christians and

specifically the Apostles faced hatred and persecution from all fronts.

It's believed that all the Apostles were martyred - John being the exception who was exiled to Patmos until his death.

vs. 14 - “the abomination that causes desolation” - what is this?

We can look back in history and see different people and events this prophesied about in the historical timeframe of the 1st and 2nd century.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-4 - Paul speaks to this kind of event.

There were things which happened in the Jewish Temple throughout history which could fit this description.

But there is also a ‘far’ prophecy at work here - something that will occur during the Tribulation of the end times as described in the book of Revelation. You don't have to try and figure out what this is specifically referring to - because it's likely referring to many things which caused the great distress and danger which the next verses describe.

vs. 14b-20 - the threat against Jews

Throughout history, there have been revolutionaries, conquering generals and others who have set up some sort of abomination in the Jerusalem Temple - and the Jewish people had to flee for their lives.

Many of them didn't flee fast enough and were murdered.

In the future - there will be yet another occurrence of this - one worse than any of the others - and Jesus says:

vs. 19 - “those will be days of distress unequalled from the beginning, when God created the world, until now - and never to be equaled again.”

vs. 21-23 - False teachers / false Christs (Messiahs)

A moment ago, I mentioned **2 Thessalonians 2:1-4**, and in that passage, Paul refers to some of the false teachers who were causing terrible problems in the churches.

“Don't be so easily shaken or alarmed by those who say that the day of the Lord has already begun. Don't believe them, even if they claim to have had a spiritual vision, a revelation, or a letter supposedly from us.

Don't be fooled by what they say.”

Paul wrote **2 Thessalonians** around 51 A.D. - only 20 years after Jesus - and already false teachers and counterfeit letters from the Apostles were causing problems in some of the churches!

All of these prophetic revelations from Jesus were to help His followers:

vs. 23 - “But be on guard; I have told you all things beforehand.”

Know what's coming.

Don't be surprised...or shocked.

So many Christians - when they experience difficulty whether from persecution of their faith or from natural disasters, failing health or the pain of sin, they are shocked and often get angry with God and some walk away from the faith as if God has broken the 'deal' they had with Him.

God has not made a magical deal with His followers that this world would be filled with joy and a painless life. He's warned us of the opposite reality.

vs. 23 - "But be on guard; I have told you all things beforehand."

The 2nd coming of Jesus. vs. 24-37

But God is in control.

Even in the darkest and most painful times - God is in control

Read vs. 24-37

Description, Timing, and Caution

Jesus first gives a description of His return.

vs. 24 describes some crazy, horrific celestial events which most scholars and theologians believe are describing the Tribulation period.

We see these events described **Revelation 6-16.**

Revelation 6:12

"When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood..."

Revelation 8:12

“The fourth angel blew his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, and a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of their light might be darkened, and a third of the day might be kept from shining, and likewise a third of the night.”

The return of Christ will not go unnoticed.

It will be a visible event for the entire world.

He will return in power.

He will return not as a Savior, but as judge and conqueror.

Then He talks about the timing - when it will happen...

He starts by using an analogy of a fig tree (Luke adds “and all the trees”).

This is a very simple analogy.

When you see leaves on the trees, you know that summer is almost here.

Jesus explains / interprets the analogy...

vs. 29 - “So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that He (the Son of Man) is near, at the very gates.”

Then He says:

vs. 30 - “Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.”

This has been a source of confusion over the years.

The question is: What generation is Jesus talking about?

The Greek term translated “generation” can mean ‘race’ - so it could refer to the Jewish people - they

won't be destroyed / wiped out - as some have tried through history and continue to try.

However, it is likely as simple as the demonstrative pronoun: “this”.

Jesus is likely saying that the generation which witnesses the signs mentioned - those who (vs. 29) “see these things happening” - “this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.”

Meaning, when Jesus returns, the events which unfold will not take long - they will not last more than 1 generation of time.

Then He gives a caution - a warning of sorts.

“But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”

vs. 33 - “Be on guard, keep awake.”

Then He uses an illustration of a servant keeping watch at the door - not sure of when His master will return. (vs. 35)

Are you one who tries to figure out when Jesus is coming back?

Stop it!

Use your energy to be alert - remain faithful - “stay awake”!

Apply it...

Utopia is out of reach for the world.

God is sovereign over all things - including world history.

Followers of Christ will face persecution and suffer for their faith in Christ.

Jesus is coming back as judge and conqueror.

Nobody knows when He's coming back - only God the Father knows.

Close in prayer