



**Mark 13:1-37**  
**Watch for the Second Coming**

**Summary:** What will the future be like and how should Christians respond?

What will the future be like and how should we prepare for it? That's the question we find Jesus and the disciples working through as we return to Mark's gospel this morning.

It's almost perfect timing because today is New Year's Eve and many of us are reflecting on the past and thinking of the future. We want to know, what will 2024 be like? What will it bring? Are there any big events coming up and what will we do about them? Maybe we're even doing a little self-reflection – what do I want to do more of this year or less of? What do I want to do differently? How do I want to change?

All of that is good. It's good to reflect and project in life, but we have to remember there's another dimension to the world – a dimension of spiritual reality that affects everything else and that's where Jesus directs our attention today.

He begins by immediately challenging our perceptions of life and what 'success' looks like. And that's important to know, especially if you're setting goals for yourself. Are you aiming at the right things?

Remember, Jesus is in Jerusalem, during Passover the biggest religious celebration of the year and these are the final days of His life. He's visiting the Temple every day and it's more crowded than the mall at Christmas - there are crowds everywhere and no place to park your donkey or camel.



The Temple is actually in the middle of a massive renovation project. King Herod the local ruler has spent years expanding and improving the facilities. It's the largest building most people have ever seen. There's nothing that comes close to it within hundreds of miles. Archeologists have found stones from the Temple that are 42' long, 11' high, and 14' wide, (that's roughly the size of a large bus) and weighing over a million pounds – that's just one stone.

The Temple was nine stories high and its doors were 50' high and 25' wide. That sounds unbelievable to us – to think that you could build something like that without an iPhone, but both the Pantheon and the Senate House in Rome had doors of similar size.



Remodeling began in the year 20 BC, before Jesus and most of His disciples were born and wasn't finished until after He died. Which means, construction has been going on for their entire lives. Every year when they came to town for Passover some new improvement had

been made. Surely, it must have felt to many people like things were coming together for the Jews – they had something to be proud of, something to point to – something you could see and touch as it grew. What must Jesus think of all this evident ‘progress’?

**Mark 13:1** Then as He went out of the temple, one of His disciples said to Him, “Teacher, see what manner of stones and what buildings *are here!*”  
2 And Jesus answered and said to him, “Do you see these great buildings? Not *one* stone shall be left upon another, that shall not be thrown down.”

And that’s true. The remodel and expansion took more than eighty years. It began in 20 BC and was finished in 64 AD. Then, six years later, in 70AD the Romans laid siege to the city and dismantled the Temple brick by brick to spite the people who had dared rebelled against the power of Rome.

So, point number one this morning if you’re evaluating your life and considering the future:

### **1. Looks Can Be Deceiving**

Jesus’ point was – don’t be impressed by what you see with your eyes. God knows what’s happening underneath, what’s happening inside and the truth is, this outwardly impressive building is out of alignment with God even though it supposedly bears His name. The renovation of this Temple was begun by Herod the Great, a terrible, mentally and emotionally unstable man, who would put his own sons and wives to death if he felt they were disloyal. The police of this Temple will be the ones who arrest Jesus in just a few days. The priests of this Temple in their fancy robes will hand Him over to Pilate, the Roman governor, and ask for His crucifixion.

The point is that appearances can be deceiving. An impressive exterior can hide or distract us from the truth within.

You can build a life that looks impressive from the outside. It looks like a massive, skyline-dominating Temple shining in the Mediterranean sun. Your life might look like you’re making progress, you’re going somewhere. People might point to you and say hey Jesus – have you seen so-and-so?

But what would He say in response?

My friends, when you look back on last year, or look forward to this coming year – can I encourage you to ask – *what would Jesus say?* Are you building a Temple that’s going to be torn down brick by brick? Will you let Jesus talk to you about that?

Because here’s what He’s going to say – *Come, build with Me.* I’ve got work for you to do *and* a way for you to do it. It might look different, but it’s going to last. I’ll even give you the resources you need for it, if you build with Me. It won’t be easy, but it will be eternal. Do you want to know more? So did the disciples.

3 Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked Him privately, 4 “Tell us, when will these things be? And what *will be* the sign when all these things will be fulfilled?”

5 And Jesus, answering them, began to say: “Take heed that no one deceives you. 6 For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am *He*,’ and will deceive many. 7 But when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be troubled; for *such things* must happen, but the end *is* not yet. 8 For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be earthquakes in various places, and there will be famines and troubles. These *are* the beginnings of sorrows.

9 “But watch out for yourselves, for they will deliver you up to councils, and you will be beaten in the synagogues. You will be brought before rulers and kings for My sake, for a testimony to them. 10 And the gospel must first be preached to all the nations. 11 But when they arrest *you* and deliver you up, do not worry beforehand, or premeditate what you will speak. But whatever is given you in that hour, speak that; for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit. 12 Now brother will betray brother to death, and a father *his* child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. 13 And you will be hated by all for My name’s sake. But he who endures to the end shall be saved.

Point number two if you’re trying to examine your life and consider the future:

## 2. **Life Is Hard, But God Is Control**

Contrast these two experiences. On the one side you have the impressive-looking Temple. You have millions of religious pilgrims coming to celebrate Passover. There are people putting money into the treasury. It’s very easy for priests in fancy robes to feel like things are going well.

And then you have Jesus telling the disciples – you should expect wars, earthquakes, famines, and troubles and that’s just the beginning of sorrows. You should expect to be arrested, beaten, put on trial and hated.

Which team do you want to sign up for?

My friends, I need you to take note of the fact that Jesus is speaking privately to four of his closest disciples, these are men He loves and He’s telling *them* – ***life will be hard, but God is in control***. He’s telling *them*, don’t be afraid. He’s telling *them* don’t worry. Why? Because God is in control. Bad things will happen. Life will be hard. *But God is in control*. He is with you. He is for you and His purposes will be accomplished. Notice, in the middle of all the difficulties we’re told of three victories:

- the gospel ***will be proclaimed*** (vs 10)
- the Holy Spirit ***will give you what you should say*** (vs 11), and
- blessing is laid up in heaven for those ***who endure*** (vs 13).

We have people in this church going through very difficult things right now. A child fighting leukemia while mom is very pregnant with another baby. A woman flying across continents to be with an aging mother battling a life-threatening illness. A family receiving a concerning diagnosis for a pregnancy that has already been difficult, scary, and faith-trying. A man who just lost his brother to a long battle with cancer. People fighting for their marriages. Men applying and applying and applying for jobs and not hearing back.

Meanwhile Garret Kell the pastor from Del Ray Baptist – which is a great, Jesus-loving, Bible-teaching church in Alexandria, and his wife Carrie, have spent the holidays in an ICU caring for their oldest daughter who suddenly collapsed a few days before Christmas and things don't look good.

*Church, life is hard. But God is in control.*

Sometimes it seems like the people over there in the Temple have it all. It seems like things are going well for them. It seems like they don't have any problems, all they're seeing is progress. And I'm over here where everything is falling apart.

It's not true.

That Temple looks nice now, but it's in stage IV of spiritual cancer, it's frail and failing and it's only got a few years left. Meanwhile, God is with those who suffer and struggle – He watches over, protects, and brings people alongside those in need. You may be arrested, betrayed, and hated, but you cannot be separated from His love. Abide in Christ. Depend on the Spirit. Invite God and His people in. [Endure to the end](#) and be saved.

If you are facing challenging times right now, I want to encourage you to ask: how does God want to walk with you through it, provide for you in it, and what will He give to you after it? He's still in control. He may even point you to a way out – look what Jesus says next:

14 "So when you see the '*abomination of desolation*,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it ought not" (let the reader understand), "then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. 15 Let him who is on the housetop not go down into the house, nor enter to take anything out of his house. 16 And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes. 17 But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! 18 And pray that your flight may not be in winter. 19 For *in* those days there will be tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the creation which God created until this time, nor ever shall be. 20 And unless the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake, whom He chose, He shortened the days. 21 "Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here *is* the Christ!' or, 'Look, *He is* there!' do not believe it. 22 For false christs and false prophets will rise and show signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. 23 But take heed; see, I have told you all things beforehand.

### **3. Avoid What You Can**

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After warning that difficult days are coming, Jesus also encourages the disciples to avoid what they can. It's a principle we see at work in His own life. There were times that people sought to harm Jesus or arrest Him and so He walked away or stayed away. Jesus did not unnecessarily poke any bears.

Paul the apostle did the same thing on numerous occasions. He had a dramatic escape from Damascus when people were looking for him and another time, he received an armed calvary escort from the Romans because people were looking to ambush him.

There are times and places in life when we must simply stand and take the blows, but not always. There are also times when it is appropriate to avoid conflict and pain. Knowing which is which requires wisdom, counsel, and the guidance of the Spirit. But it all starts with this – the willingness to say, with sincerity, *Lord, I'll take whichever path You say. I'm not here to insist on my comfort, I'm here to seek your will.*

It's like Moses prayed in Exodus 33, Lord don't send me up from this place unless You go with me. I'll go anywhere or endure anything; I just want to know that's where You'll meet me. I don't want suffering without you, but *I don't want to escape without You either.* My greatest desire in life is not for my circumstances, it's for my connection with You.

False christs and false prophets will offer you a way out, Jesus will offer you a way through. And the truth of the matter is, sometimes God calls us to go through difficult things because we learn things about Him and about ourselves that we would not learn any other way. So, Jesus says, [take heed](#).

24 “But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; 25 the stars of heaven will fall, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. 26 Then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. 27 And then He will send His angels, and gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest part of earth to the farthest part of heaven.

#### **4. I Will Go To Him or He Will Come To Me**

Whether God sends me to escape circumstances or walks with me through them, this much is true: His purposes will be accomplished. Church, you need to know this. You know need to know this deep, deep, down in your heart, mind, and soul – whatever the path, communion is the destination. I will go to Him, or He will come to me.

This is the main point of history – God is gathering the elect to Himself.

No one and nothing can stop Him. The sun may darken and the moon stop shining, the stars of heaven may fall and the powers in the heavens be shaken, but the Son of Man *will* come in great power and glory and gather those who are His.

I will go to Him, or He will come to me.

28 “Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender, and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. 29 So you also, when you see these things happening, know that it is near—at the doors! 30 Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. 31 Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.

## When will all this happen?

So far I’ve been trying to help us understand what Jesus was saying and still make application to our modern lives, but I need to take a minute and address some of the important technical aspects of this passage.

All Christians, of all denominations, believe in the Second Coming of Christ. What they disagree about is the details. Some of you Bible nerds may know or have heard of terms like premillennial or amillennial, the Great Tribulation, pre-tribulation, post-tribulation, and the rapture. Those are all terms used to talk about when and how Christ will return.

Here at City Gates we teach a pretribulation, premillennial, return of Christ. But, there are other Jesus-loving, Bible-teaching churches and Christians that see things differently.

Some of the division comes down to how you understand verse 30. What does Jesus mean when He says [this generation](#) will by no means pass away until these things happen?

Everyone agrees that the events listed in verses 5-13 apply to the immediate situation in Israel in the first century. Everyone agrees that Jesus is prophetically telling people to prepare for the upcoming Roman invasion which will happen within their lifetime.

But is that a [generation](#)? And does that mean that all of these other things happened in the first century as well? Some say yes, this is the amillennialist view.

Others, myself included, say no for many reasons, but here are just three quick ones.

- a. In vs 19 Jesus speaks of a coming tribulation that will be greater than any that has ever happened before or will ever happen again. If that means the Roman invasion in 70 AD, how do we explain the Holocaust?
- b. In vs 24 Jesus speaks of disturbances in the heavens. Some say that’s a poetic description of political disruptions – that kings and those in authority will be removed from power, but Revelation 6 gives more details about these events and makes clear – things are happening in the sky and people on earth, including kings, are scared and hiding in caves as a result.
- c. In vs 27 Jesus says He will gather His elect from the four winds, which, again, doesn’t seem to have happened yet.

So, premillennialists see a dual-fulfillment here. Yes, Jesus is speaking to His disciples about events they will see in their own lifetimes. There will be a near fulfillment. But that's only a foreshadow of what will come at the end of days when there will be another, ultimate fulfillment.

Consider this, for centuries Bible scholars had to work on interpreting these passages in a world where there was no Jewish state. It had been wiped out in 70 AD and never existed again. So, it seemed to many, that must be what the passages meant- somehow it all referred to the events of the first century.

But others held on to this crazy idea that the pieces don't all fit together, so God must be planning something else.<sup>1</sup> And then, in 1948, when Israel was re-established as a nation, it became possible that another Temple might be built and we may yet see the final fulfillment of this passage. Perhaps even in our own lifetimes.

Because, another way to interpret the word [generation](#) is as a race, family, or lineage. In other words, what Jesus might be saying here is that even as these events unfold, in both the first century and in the ultimate fulfillment in the days to come, the Jewish nation will be preserved – which is exactly what we have seen – a people that were no longer a nation have become a nation again.

So, look with me then at Jesus' final instruction for how we should live as we wait for these things to unfold:

32 “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 33 Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is. 34 *It is* like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch. 35 Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming—in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning— 36 lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. 37 And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!”

## 5. Watch, Work, & Pray

How should we live as we wait for Christ's return in a world filled with difficulty and opposition? The same way Jesus instructed His first disciples: watch, work, and pray. As I studied this passage the first thing that stood out to me is how often Jesus says pay attention, [take heed](#), see, [watch](#), look. He uses five different Greek words to make the point.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example the works of JC Ryle writing in 1857: “I venture, though with much diffidence, to suggest that a more complete and literal accomplishment yet remains to come.”

Which tells me this is something important. It tells me Jesus wants me to live my life aware of Him and what's He's doing. Jesus doesn't want me to be ignorant.

Look at the very last thing He says: [37 And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!](#)"

That's pretty clear, isn't it? So, what does that look like? It reminds me of passages like:

[Matt 6:33](#) seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

[Prov 3:5](#) Trust in the LORD with all your heart,  
And lean not on your own understanding;  
6 In all your ways acknowledge Him,  
And He shall direct your paths.

What does it mean to [watch](#)? It means to check in with God – invite Him in. Live your life in light of Him. Keep one eye on heaven while you're living on earth.

And then work. Live well here and now, love your neighbor as yourself. Get out of bed each day and go make a difference for others. Be light. Resist darkness. Make beauty. Defend and protect. Set the conditions for health and flourishing. Keep one eye on earth while you're waiting for heaven.

And finally, with one eye toward heaven and one eye here on earth, pray for God to close the gap between the two. Ask for the power of the Holy Spirit to be active in your daily life – to make a difference in your marriage, in your study, in your work. Pray the Lord's Prayer: [Your Kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven.](#)

So, let's wrap this all up. What am I saying? What do you need to know as you look at your life and consider the future? What is God and doing and what should we expect? Well, remember:

**Looks can be deceiving** – don't judge life by what you see on the surface, sometimes the Temple you're so impressed by is already condemned

**Life will be hard, but God is in control** – There will be tears, but you will see God show up – His will will be done

**Avoid what you can** – don't assume you always have to suffer, there may be a way out

**I will go to Him or He will come to me** – This is the outcome for all who trust Christ, so

**Watch, Work & Pray** – One eye on heaven, one eye on earth, praying for the two to come together

This is our hope for the New Year and for every day until Christ comes, whatever they may bring. So, why don't you take a minute now and pray, speak back to the God who has been speaking to you this morning.





## Sermon Application and Discussion Questions

### Mark 13:1-37

### Watch for the Second Coming

**Summary:** What will the future be like and how should Christians respond?

NOTE: This passage is often referred to as the Olivet Discourse, it has parallels in Matthew 24-25 and Luke 21.

- What are you looking forward to in the coming year? What are you glad to have put behind you?
- Looks can be deceiving. What other examples can think of in Scripture of people or things who looked, spoke, or acted, like they had it all together, but were corrupted inside?
  - o Have you found areas of your life where the inside doesn't match the outside? What can be done to fix this?
  - o What do you know about the way Jesus appeared and presented Himself? Read Isaiah 53 – what do you learn about His appearance?
- What makes life hard in general? What makes your life hard specifically?
  - o How do you react to Jesus' warning that this is real life, but God is in control? Do you wish He would say or do something different?
  - o How have you been helped in your difficulty by Christ or the church?
- What have you learned about fleeing trouble? How do you know when to stay and work through the difficulties and when drop everything and get away?
  - o Compare the following passages and note, what did Paul do in each? Acts 17:1-15; Acts 21:10-14. What can we learn from this?
- I will go to Him, or He will come to me. How does this comfort or encourage you? Read Revelation 19:11-21. Notice how much space is spent describing Jesus. How much is spent describing the battle? Why do you think this is?
- What do Christians today need to learn from this passage if it all refers to events happening in AD 70? What if it has a near (70AD) and far (last days) fulfillment?
- What does it look like to watch, work, and pray? How does this apply in your life?