

2. Meet Jesus: As He maps out the future

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[0 : 00] So if you'd like to open your Bibles, we're in Mark's Gospel and we're in chapter 13. Mark chapter 13, it's on page 849.

Mark chapter 13 and we'll read from verse 14. We've already looked at the first half of chapter 13. So we come to this group of prophecies sort of halfway through, but we'll recap on what we've done so far, so don't worry about that.

You can see verse 14 starts with but, so that immediately indicates that there's something gone before. So chapter 13 from verse 14. But when you see the abomination of desolation standing where it ought not to be, let the reader understand.

Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let the one who is on the housetop not go down, nor enter his house to take anything out. And let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak.

And alas for women who are pregnant, and for those who are nursing infants in those days. Pray that it may not happen in winter. For in those days there will be such tribulation as has not been from the beginning of creation that God created until now, and never will be.

[1 : 23] And if the Lord had not caught short the days, no human would be saved. But for the sake of the elect whom he chose, he shortened the days. And then if anyone says to you, look, here is the Christ, or look, there he is, do not believe it.

False Christs and false prophets will arise and perform signs and wonders to lead astray, if possible, the elect. But be on your guard. I have told you all things beforehand.

But in those days, after the tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

From the fig tree, learn its lesson. As soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates.

[2 : 36] Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

The Christian life isn't easy, is it? Am I right? Jesus says, doesn't he, he says, take up your cross and follow me.

But the things of this world, friends, well, they're so attractive, aren't they? I find it that way. You know, they seem to offer us the security that we long for all of our lives.

And if we're not careful, we can slowly drift away and find ourselves living for something that's not Jesus.

This lunchtime, Jesus gives us the big picture. And it's going to help us all to live for him, not for the things of this world.

[3 : 39] But we begin with some shocking news. Just look with me at chapter 13, back a page from where we've just finished the reading. Chapter 13, verses 1 and 2.

Just look there. The first couple of verses. And as he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, Look, teacher, what wonderful stones and wonderful buildings.

And Jesus said to him, Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.

Well, that took the wind out of the sails, didn't it? Wasn't that shocking news? It was like a bolt out of the blue. Did you see how it was like juxtaposed?

Just look at it again. Look at verse 1. Can you see verse 1? The disciples are just expressing their delight in the temple. Verse 2, do you see? Jesus condemns the temple.

[4 : 36] What a shock! You know, you'd almost expect Peter to take Jesus aside and say, Look, Jesus, you've got this all wrong. The temple's been built to last for thousands of years.

You shouldn't be so destructive. You just imagine that, can't you? But Peter, well, he bites his tongue.

And they convene a meeting. Up on the Mount of Olives. And Jesus gets probed, doesn't he? About what he just said. And it's like Mark's reader.

It's like Mark's reader squeezes in with the disciples to listen to Jesus. Just have a look with me. Have a look with me. Verses 3 and 4. And as Jesus sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew and Mark's reader, we want in on this, we asked him privately, Tell us, when will these things be?

And what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished? Yes, they've gone and asked the creator of the universe, haven't they?

[5 : 52] They've gone and asked the creator of the universe about the future. And we're all ears. Now Jesus here, in these prophecies, there's two time frames in mind.

The first time frame is up until the end of the temple. And then the second time frame he has in mind is to the end of the world.

And like most prophecy, it's not a detailed chronology. You can't go home and put a date on your kitchen calendar when the Lord's going to return.

And I've noticed that these two time frames, they sort of overlap a little bit. There's a certain amount of uncertainty as to which period of time Jesus is talking about.

So let's think firstly about the end of the temple. And if you look with me at the first few words of chapter 13, you'll see that Jesus is just leaving the temple.

[6 : 55] Can you see that? And as he came out of the temple, Jesus had entered the temple in chapter 11. And well, wasn't he like a bull in a china shop?

Wasn't he? You know, it would have made good television news. You could see all the footage. You know, all the pigeon cages turned over. The tables lying on the floor here.

Coins strewn all over the place. The bewildered Pharisees. Well, I guess they're whispering to each other. Having a team meeting. Trying to formulate their response to it all.

Think about this. Jesus wasn't tinkering around the edges, was he? This wasn't new wine into old wineskins. But a totally new order.

And so Jesus, friends, he dies on the cross. And the temple curtain is torn in two. And it's the end of the temple system.

[7 : 59] There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down. And we come to that strange expression. In verse 14, did you see it?

But when you see the abomination of desolation standing where it ought not to be, let the reader understand. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. The abomination of desolation, it's clearly some sort of sacrilege.

Some sort of obscenity against God. And in AD 70, the military commander, Titus, he came to Jerusalem and he besieged the temple.

And his troops set it on fire. And it was completely destroyed. Listen to this. This is a Jewish historian, Josephus.

The Romans brought their standards into the temple area. And erecting them opposite the east gate, sacrificed to them there. With thunderous acclamation, they hailed Titus.

[9 : 07] You can just imagine it, can't you? It's like something from the Third Reich. Hail Titus! Hail Titus! You can just imagine that.

And they took all the booty, it's called, isn't it, back to Rome. All the gold vessels and the trumpet. And do you know that Cangalabra thing? Menorah, it's called. They took that back to Rome with them.

And you can actually see it today. In Rome, there's a big arch which was built just after the temple destruction. And you'll see depicted on that arch, the troops carrying this big menorah back into Rome.

So we're talking about history. We're talking about fulfilled prophecy. I took the wife there on our honeymoon to have a look at it. It's great. I suppose it's like a newspaper report back from AD 70.

In the Old Testament part of the Bible, King David brought the ark into Jerusalem. And he was dancing in front of it.

[10:12] He was overjoyed. And then he handed over the construction of the temple to Solomon, his son. And one day the Queen of Sheba visited to see all that the Lord was doing.

But God's people had abused their privilege. And Herod's temple was now just a facade. An enormous building for what had become a man-made institution.

And the church isn't immune to such things. Jesus says, remember the height from which you have fallen to the church in Ephesus.

And it's all too late now for the temple institution. Jesus says to his disciples in verse 14, don't be sitting ducks, flee to the mountains.

And there are times, friends, in evangelism, when escape from the enemy is the best course of action. I guess it's a little bit like on the Dunkirk beaches, isn't it?

[11:19] Our troops. Listen to this. With God, apparent failure is often the opposite. And what seems to us like bad news finds its place in God's unfolding plans and purposes for his church.

And the gospel invaded the whole world, didn't it? When the disciples fled from Jerusalem. And we move now from the end of the temple to the end of the world.

And suddenly we move from those looking at past events to those looking at 2010 and beyond. And that's our second point, the end of the world.

Just look at me at verse 26. Look with me at verse 26. And remember, Jesus is speaking to his disciples. Can you see verse 26? And then you will see the Son.

No, it doesn't say that, does it? And then they will see the Son of Man. Jesus is speaking about his return. And he's saying there's going to be a different group of people that will see it.

[12:34] The disciples will actually see the AD 70 event, or at least some of them. But this is a different group of people in verse 26. Look back at verse 14. You'll see the contrast there.

Jesus is speaking with his disciples here. And he says, look, can you see? But when you see the abomination of desolation. So we're talking about a different group of people when Jesus returns. And just look with me at that event. Look at verses 24 and 25. But in those days, after the tribulation, the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light.

And the stars will be falling from heaven. And the powers in their heavens will be shaken. It's like sort of travelling back in the creation account.

It's not God putting the stars into place, but the stars falling from their place. It's not let there be light, but let the light be withdrawn.

[13:36] So the cosmos gives up its light. And Jesus appears to take centre stage.

Verse 26. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. Unmistakable, isn't it, that?

Great power and glory. This is prophecy. This is God revealing himself to his people. The mystery of his ways.

A bunch of dishevelled fishermen. A tax collector. Mark's reader. They sit round, don't they, on the Mount of Olives. Listening to a carpenter's son.

Talking about the future of the cosmos. It's so contrary, isn't it? To what the eyes take in.

[14:35] You know, the beautiful temple in the background there. Who will they trust? Like a root out of dry ground. He had no form or majesty that we should look at him.

No beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men. A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And as one from men hide their faces, he was despised and we esteemed him not.

Yet verse 26, friends. There will be a day when Jesus will not be mocked. There will be a day when he will not be mocked by our conceited world.

He won't be mocked by our sin. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. Paul Barnett writes about that moment.

Just listen to this. This will be the great climax of the age to be described only in otherworldly cosmic language. As in the book of Revelation.

[15:44] As we who abound within time and history hear these words of Jesus and contemplate the frontiers of time and eternity, when God's kingdom will appear in fullness and radiance, we are confronted with both majesty and mystery.

But this I know, all flesh shall see his glory, and he shall reap the harvest he has sown. And some glad day his sun shall shine in splendor when he the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is known. And so Jesus returns, doesn't he, in glory. But why is he returning? Verse 27. Can you see that? And then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven, to gather the elect.

What a lovely expression, isn't it, that? O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone-nose sent to you, how I have longed to gather you together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.

Old Israel, they were not willing, were they? They crucified Jesus. But there will be a day when the longing of Jesus' heart will be fulfilled as he returns to gather his church.

[17:15] It's the day, isn't it, that Abraham could see, way back in Genesis chapter 12. And as Christians, friends, we need to be forward-looking people so that we don't get intoxicated by this world's agenda.

Billy and Anne set this room up this morning. When I came in, they were busy putting the Bibles out and making it in a nice environment.

Why are Bibles so important to us as a church here? Think about this. Without the Bible, people focus, don't they, on the things of this world.

The disciples were focusing on the temple, weren't they? Chapter 13, verse 1. But verse 31 of our passage, friends, Jesus tells his disciples, and he tells you and me, that the only security in this world is his word.

Verse 31, heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. That's security for us, isn't it, as we leave here this afternoon.

[18:38] Shall we pray? Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you for your son, the Alpha and Omega.

And we give thanks, Father, that you sent him to save us from the penalty of our sin, to renew us in his likeness, and to draw us together as his family.

And Father, we desire that you would reorientate us, so that we live amidst this confused world with your priorities, with your eternal perspective.

And we ask that, as we go from here as your disciples, that we would be able to live our lives with the perspective of eternity, and that through your spirit, you would help us with all the day-to-day decisions that come our way.

And to that end, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us now, this day and forevermore.

[19:46] Amen.