

A Telescope on the Future

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[0 : 00] Well, we are going to turn to our Bible reading and we're going to read from Mark chapter 13. If you have one of our Blue Visitors Bibles, you will find that I think on page 849.

Page 849. And we're going to read together from the beginning of the chapter and then the last couple of paragraphs at the end of the chapter.

But perhaps during the offering you will have time to read through the rest of what goes in between because Simon is going to lead us through the whole chapter a little later on.

Mark chapter 13 and Jesus is speaking to his disciples. As Jesus came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, Look, teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings.

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

[1 : 05] As he sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew 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?

And Jesus began to speak to them. Let's move on to verse 28. And he said, 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.

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.

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

[2 : 07] Be on your guard. Keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. It's like a man going on a journey when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake.

Therefore, stay awake. For you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening or at midnight, or when the cock crows, or in the morning, lest he come suddenly and find you asleep.

What I say to you, I say to all, stay awake. Amen. May God bless us his word.

Good morning, dear friends. Thank you for your welcome. And let's bow our heads. Our Heavenly Father, we ask that as we turn to the Scriptures, that in our weakness you would give us strength.

In our foolishness, that you would give us wisdom. In our dullness, that you would give quickening. And we pray, Heavenly Father, for the dear people who are gathered this morning, that they would not just hear a voice, but in your word they would hear your voice.

[3 : 35] We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, it's very good of you to have two Australians in the service in one morning. You truly are a godly people to have such riffraff come and be with you.

And it's a very special day in the Philip home, because it's a key birthday for Rebecca. And I was thinking in honor that I probably... I was thinking I should preach on Psalm 21, as a special reference to her birthday.

But I've taken Mark chapter 13. So if you've got Mark chapter 13, this is a wonderful gift to us, this chapter, because what Jesus gives us in the chapter is a telescope that looks forward in the short term and the long term.

And because we're very short-sighted by nature, we are just short-sighted people. We think about things like the weekend and the week that is coming and a job that has to be done and a trip that we're going to take.

And our horizon is very limited. But here in this wonderful chapter, Jesus gives us a telescope which looks down the road to something which is fairly immediate and then looks down to something which is ultimate.

[4 : 56] And what Jesus does in this chapter, as many of you know, is he predicts the time the city of Jerusalem will be invaded, and it was. And then he predicts the time where the world will be invaded by him, and it will be invaded.

So I thought we might try and get a handle on the whole chapter by looking at under three headings this morning, that first of all, Jesus is our security, and we'll see why.

Secondly, that he is our authority, and we'll see why. And thirdly, he is our priority, and we will see why. So security, authority, priority, S-A-P, sap as in a tree, when I bump into you after the service and say, can you remember anything of the sermon, there may be one or two of you who will say, security, authority, priority.

That's the plan. So first of all, Jesus is our security, chapter 13 of Mark, verse 1, as Jesus was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said, look teacher, what massive stones, what magnificent buildings, and Jesus said, they will all be pushed over.

Notice he says, or notice we read in verse 1, that he leaves the temple. This is a highly significant phrase. He never goes back to the temple.

[6 : 17] He is finished with the temple. The temple is no longer part of God's plans. That Old Testament temple is no longer part of God's plans for two reasons. One, it has failed.

It's failed in its mission. It was meant to be an instrument of truth and mercy and an arrow to the Messiah, and it was doing none of those things. It's failed.

You remember that the temple was attacked by Jesus, turning the tables. You remember that the people in the temple attacked him with their hard questions.

The temple has failed. Second, it's finished its job. All the sacrifices of the Old Testament, as you know, were a warm up to the great sacrifice of Christ on the cross, and Jesus now wants people to look away from the Old Temple to him.

But it was a great building. We're told that it covered many football fields and that some of the stones that have been discovered or recovered were five yards by five yards by ten yards.

[7 : 26] No wonder the disciples said, it's magnificent. And they were shocked when Jesus said it would be pushed over. And it was violently pushed over. We're told that when the Roman troops came in, they attacked the building with a frenzy.

And you can imagine the disciples thinking to themselves, well, last time the temple was destroyed, we went off as prisoners to Babylon, so what are we talking about? But you don't need the temple, says Jesus, the old temple.

You need him. This is very comforting because we're all going to leave this particular room or the room downstairs or we're going to walk home or get in our cars.

And the point Jesus is making is that if you go home with him because you've put your trust in him and you belong to him, you have everything. Our mother-in-law, my mother-in-law, has just passed away at the age of 92, nearly 93, and it's been a very lovely thing to see this godly woman basically peacefully farewell everything in this world and go with Jesus out of the world.

We actually just watch this process of him looking after her and her going to meet him. So it's a very comforting thing. If you have Jesus, forget about the building.

[8 : 48] But it's also very challenging because if you have building or religion but not Jesus, you are really of all to be most pitied. You know, if you only know the building and you know the minister and you know the coffee and you know the hymns, but you don't actually know Jesus Christ, he's a stranger to you and you are to him.

Well, of course, you're in a tragic position. And not long ago, I talked to a lady in the church who'd been in some particular church for 75 years and had no clue what it was to be a Christian.

Not a clue. She'd sung every hymn. She'd sung Amazing Grace. She'd sung And Can It Be. She'd heard the sermons. Every visiting evangelist, nothing had connected.

So Jesus says, the temple is finished. It will soon be destroyed. And the disciples ask in verse 4, when and what will be the sign?

Now, before Jesus answers the question, he tells them what he thinks is important. They think the destruction of the building is important. He says, let me tell you what is important.

[9 : 59] And the first thing he says, verse 5, this is typical of Jesus and this is so instructive for us. He says, watch out that no one deceives you. That nobody comes in my name and deceives you, meaning takes you away from me.

So Jesus says to the disciples, you're worried about the building. I'm worried that you'll lose me.

Now, my friends, do people get tricked away from Jesus? They do.

You'll know many people, sadly, who have walked with Jesus or seem to walk with Jesus. And have gone on a journey away. And that's why so many of the New Testament letters, like Hebrews, are saying, don't leave Jesus for the temple.

Or 1 Corinthians, don't leave Jesus for some superstar pastor. Or Colossians, don't leave Jesus for some mystical philosopher. Or Galatians, don't leave Jesus for some legalist.

People do, don't they? And those who've grown up in the world with the foundation of Jesus and have yet turned to Mary, what a tragedy, or to Muhammad, what a tragedy.

[11 : 11] So Jesus says, first, make sure your soul is safe. Second, he says, verse 7, make sure your mind is clear. When you hear of wars, rumors of wars, don't be alarmed.

This has got nothing, says Jesus, to do with the second coming. Such things must happen. The end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, kingdom against kingdom, earthquake, famine.

These are the beginning of birth pangs. You've got to have a clear mind. So when you're watching the news and you see that the possibility of a war, which is very alarming, or an earthquake has taken place, which is very distressing, or a famine, which is very distressing, you have to say to yourself as you watch or hear, this is not the end of the world.

This is the world. This is the normal world that we live in. Jesus says, verse 7, the end is not yet.

Have a clear mind. Thirdly, your strength will be given to you, verse 9, because when you are arrested, especially to the first century disciples, and you're taken to synagogues or local councils and you stand before governors and kings and you give witness, the gospel is your first priority, verse 10, and when you're arrested and brought to trial, don't worry beforehand about what you'll say.

Just say what's given because it will not be you speaking but the Holy Spirit. You'll be given your strength. When you are arrested, says Jesus to his disciples, don't think to yourself, gee, I've been deserted by God at this point.

[12 : 42] No, he will be with you in that particular context and will help you to know what to say.

And there must have been many occasions where Jesus himself went on under his trials and said exactly what was appropriate and then the apostles found themselves being arrested and also were given the right words to say.

We see it so much in the book of Acts, don't we? Notice that the gospel is the priority, verse 10, the gospel must first be preached. I don't think he's saying in this verse the gospel must be preached to everyone before Christ can come.

Undoubtedly, God would love every person to hear the gospel, but I don't think in the context Jesus is saying the gospel must be preached before Christ can come.

I think in the context he's saying when you're in the courtroom, it's the gospel first. That's your priority. It's not your skin, it's not your success, it's not your case, it's the gospel.

There's your opportunity. And then Jesus says, fourthly, your heart is with Christ. Your family may desert you.

[13 : 52] Unbelievable, isn't it, that a child would betray a parent? Imagine a child ringing up the authorities and saying, I'm just telling you that my parents are Christians.

Or a parent rings up and says, I'm just letting you know that my children have become Christians. a terrible betrayal. And everyone says Jesus may hate you, but stand firm.

So Jesus is our security. It's not the temple, it's Jesus. And he wants our soul to be safe, our mind to be clear, our strength to be given, and our heart to be with him.

Second, he's our authority. Look at chapter 13, verse 14. He begins to talk about the events which will take place just down the track and the invasion of Jerusalem.

And he shows himself to be a great, great authority because the city was invaded in AD 70 and the prediction came true as Jesus said.

[15 : 01] Last week, I was preaching at a church and a friendly Scotsman came up and told me, I think he was making a comment on the famous frugality of the Scots. He said that if in my visit to Scotland I go to the Highlands, he said if it gets very cold, laddie in the Highlands, the men will

gather around a candle.

And he said if it gets very, very cold, they'll light it. Which I thought was quite cute. And I think what he was saying was, I have some information for you and if you pursue it, you may discover, well, of course, he's talking fiction.

But here Jesus is talking non-fiction. He says in chapter 13, verse 14, when you see the abomination that causes desolation, standing where it does not belong, then let those who are in Judea run for the hills.

So he's answering their question, what will be the sign of the fall of the temple? And he says in verse 14, it will be an evil sign.

There will be an abomination that causes desolation. Or one translation says there'll be a monster that causes chaos. Or we might say there'll be great evil that will bring emptiness to the place.

[16:21] This phrase, abomination that causes desolation, is a quote from the Old Testament, from the book of Daniel, chapter 12. And it's where Daniel predicted an abomination in the temple, which took place.

Because the Greeks came in, in about 168 BC, and they blasphemed the temple. They set up a pig on the altar, and they basically began to worship Zeus.

And this was a great abomination. A great fist, so to speak, in the face of Yahweh. And Jesus now borrows the quote, abomination that causes desolation.

And he says, there'll be another abomination that causes desolation in the temple. And he spoke the truth, because just a few decades down the track, in came the Romans, slaughtered many, and stacked corpses around the altar in the temple.

So Jesus spoke the truth. Now, in case you think those two events, one in the Old Testament, one in the early decades of the AD, are all ancient history, we're told in 2 Thessalonians chapter 2, that the devil is always in the business of replacing the glory of God with something evil.

[17:46] And we could talk for hours about the thousands of ways the devil organizes something that is idolatrous and evil to stand in the place of God's glory.

Well, what wisdom does Jesus give his disciples when this abomination takes place? Verse 14, he says, run for the hills. Forget about your coat. Forget about your possessions. Run for the hills.

Get out of the city. And what Jesus said came true. The Roman forces came in. The Christians fled the city. They had listened to Jesus. When this took place, they left the city.

But many of the Jews who'd rejected the Messiah stayed. And they were killed in great numbers. They paid a very heavy price turning their back on the Messiah.

I think that's why Jesus says in verse 14, verse 19, that the distress will be the worst, will be unequaled and unparalleled. Because I think this is the worst experience that Jerusalem ever went through.

[18:47] I think he's talking about what took place in Jerusalem. Now, let me remind you this morning that what took place in Jerusalem was not taking place to a city that was innocent or sweet.

this was a city that had turned its back on the Messiah. Jesus had come into the city. He'd visited. He'd healed. He'd taught.

He'd loved. He'd invited. He'd pleaded. He'd wept. And they took him outside the city and they crucified him outside.

So there is nothing left for the city but death. They've turned their back on the gift of life and they received, even in the short term, if not in the long term, a very terrible death.

Well, you notice how lovingly Jesus warns, which of course, that's what love does. Love warns. The world says to the church, please don't interfere.

[19:48] Don't say anything that would interfere. Put your warnings away. We hate your warnings. Just say that we can do whatever we want and there'll be no consequences.

That's exactly what is said in the garden in Genesis 3, isn't it? You can have everything and there'll be no consequences. And that's what the world loves from the church. But love speaks the truth.

And love says to people, you're in great danger. You need to turn. You need to get safe. You need to turn from your sin. You need to drop your sin. You need to get quickly to Christ.

You need to turn to him and to run to him. That's what Jesus does here. So he urges and he pleads and then he says in verse 20 that God will cut short the suffering and so in some remarkable way God must have cut short the suffering and then he, Jesus goes on in verse 21 to say and remember

the deceivers.

Those people who will come along when things are terrible and tell you they've got some simple, quick answer solution. Watch out for those people. So Jesus is our authority and since he got the first prediction right as he put the telescope out he will get the second prediction right as he puts the telescope right out to his return.

[21 : 11] That's why in verse 24 he says in those days those final days the end of the world is going to be very different. The end of the world is going to be a cosmic experience.

We're not talking about grabbing your coat or coming down off the roof or quickly scooping up your possessions. We're talking about the change of the cosmos. We're talking about sun, moon and stars and the coming of the son of man so that everybody in the whole world will see him.

He won't be coming in the Sydney heads or coming to New York or to Glasgow. He'll be seen by the whole world. And as we know from Jesus it will be him personal global it will be wonderful Jesus says in Luke 21 the believer will lift up his head or her head and say my salvation my redemption is coming.

It will be terrible for the person who has rejected Christ. It will be terrible terrible. and Jesus says it's predicted because he's told us but it's going to be unexpected like a thief in the night.

So he left in the clouds Acts 1 he ascended to the throne in the clouds and he's going to come verse 26 in the clouds. Now my friends we didn't see the fall of Jerusalem nobody here saw the fall of Jerusalem we may not see the second coming I would be wonderful to see the second coming I would love to be part of that generation that will see the second coming and one generation will see the second coming but even if we didn't see the fall of Jerusalem and we don't see the coming of Jesus we know he said the first rightly and we know he speaks the second truthfully and therefore we live between the two thankful that he kept his promise and thankful that he will keep his promise he's our authority that's why he says in verse 23 be on your guard I have told you and then thirdly this morning Jesus is our priority he's our security not the old temple but him he's our authority keeps his promises thirdly he's our priority and what I love about this whole chapter is that

[23 : 39] Jesus obviously intervenes for our welfare do you know that sort of person who breaks in to prevent you from going down the wrong road taking the wrong turn making the wrong move that person who intervenes because they love you that's what Jesus does he intervenes he interrupts and he's pleading in the chapter I want you to be ready I don't want you to be deceived I don't want you to be lost I want you to be saved and not only does he plead for our security but he bleeds for our security so that we might be saved well in the little paragraph from verse 28 which we had read for us he goes back to the question of the first century disciples getting ready for the local invasion and look at what he says in verse 28 learn this lesson from the fig tree as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out you know summer is near now we understand this principle don't we we know when summer has come your days get very long certain fruits come back to the shop pale scottish skin begins to appear from under clothes and in

Australia the sound of mowers every week mowing the lawn is heard the sounds and the sights and the signs of summer but Jesus says in the same way verse 29 when these things happen and he's talking about the collapse of the temple and the arrival of the abomination you know he says the enemy is at the door you ask me says Jesus verse 4 about these things well verse 29 I'm telling you about these things and the attack came exactly as he said and it came before that generation passed away that's why Jesus says these things to do with this first fall will take place before this generation passes away very important to notice this many people have jumped on the verse before this generation and said oh Jesus obviously made a mistake here he was thinking you know that he would return before the end of the generation but he's obviously got things wrong we must have pity upon Jesus no he says you've been talking about these things these things will happen before this generation and then he changes the topic in verse 32 and says but about that day well that's a different matter now Jesus was a great truth teller that's why we're so grateful for him he said to one man who'd come with a servant sick back home if you walk home you'll find him well and the man walked home and found

Jesus well that found the servant well and then Jesus said to the disciples on one occasion let's go round to Bethany and we'll raise Lazarus and they went and they raised and then he said to the disciples if you go round the corner you'll find a donkey tied to a fence and if you untie it they'll say this and you say this and bring it and I'll ride it to Jerusalem and that's what happened and he said to them if you follow this man who's carrying a water jar he'll go up to an upper room and that's

where we'll have the last supper and that's what they found and that's what they did and he said to Judas you'll betray me and he did and he said to Peter you'll deny me and Peter said I won't and Jesus said you will and he did and Jesus said I'll be arrested and he was and crucified and he was and raised and he was and he said the spirit will come and he did and he said Jerusalem will fall and it did and there'll be troubles for believers and the were and he'll return and he will this tremendous succession of promises and fulfillments which is why of course we can take seriously verse 31 heaven and earth will pass away my word says Jesus will never pass away now verse 32 about that day

Jesus says I don't have a date for you I do not have a date for you no angel has a date for you and friends you can be sure no preacher has a date and no paperback has a date and no dreamer has a date and Jesus says he himself doesn't have a date only the father so he submits himself in a wonderful way to the knowledge of the father on this detail as somebody has said he's ignorant about this issue but he's not ignorant of his ignorance and therefore he speaks with authority on what he knows and this detail that he knows he doesn't know well what does Jesus want us to do as we wait this is what appears in verses 32 to 37 and this promise of no date has done good for the church hasn't it because the church for 2000 years not knowing the date of Jesus return has been kept expectant praying waiting watching sacrificing gospeling rejoicing expecting it's done us good it's very very shrewd to not be told the date every generation in every country has been kept expectant but what does Jesus expect us to do basically you can bring it down to two words in verses 32 to 37 he expects us to watch and to work watch he says because it's a spiritual battle right up until the second coming and work he says because there are things for every believer to do every believer is to watch and to work and therefore we've got to say to ourselves when we get up in the morning that we're servants we've got a task and although the day may look pretty dull to us it is actually a very very important day in God's purposes and so we say to ourselves as we wake up in the morning if possible

I'm going into a battleground not a playground I must be watchful and there are opportunities for me to pray think say not speak speak answer and I am looking to be useful we don't say as we get up in the morning as the world does I'm an independent agent and I own my life and my life is my business no we say as we get up we've been saved by the Lord Jesus he made us he saved us he owns us he's one day going to assess us and therefore we are seeking to be useful don't say as some of you may be tempted I think my life is pretty useless that's impossible the prayer the word the letter the email those little things are used by

[30 : 58] God for great great lasting good and if he has called you you don't need great muscles to be useful you don't need great brilliance to be useful you just need to be willing one of the most useful people in our church back home is a quadriplegic lady in her wheelchair she preaches a thousand sermons to us by her godly life her trust her witness her sweetness her wisdom it is a blessing to us and so the Lord is able to use you don't forget that the word watch and work are not just imperatives but are also indicatives in that Jesus did them before us he watched to the end that's why we're secure he worked to the cross that's why we're secure he's not asking us to watch and work so we'll be secure he watched and worked to make us secure he asks us to watch and work in order to be useful so don't take your lead from television commercials which are very self-centered and rubbish don't live your life during the week in such a way that you confuse your fellow workers and they look at you and say

I hear he's a Christian unbelievable don't confuse your fellow workers live by the grace of God as consistently as you can don't be a spectator in your church don't come like a sponge but say to yourself I'm watching and I'm working even when I come to the local church there is a role for me to play and I hope you might with me get into the habit every morning of waking up and saying I'm walking into an opportunity as well as some challenges and I'm asking the Lord to overrule all things for my godliness and for his glory so Jesus is our security he's the true temple if you have him you have your security he's our authority he keeps his promises and he will keep this great promise of a return and he's our priority because as we live in the world we're seeking to watch and to work I want to just close by reading you a little letter that

I received a week or so ago a lady wrote to me most of the letters I get are crabby so feel free to write a lovely letter to me anytime but this letter came from a sweet lady I don't really know her and she said this she said this is a long overdue letter I wanted to tell you that my most difficult child who came to your church and would not speak to anybody I met you one night and you took down

his details and you contacted him and you took him out to coffee and you befriended him and you gave him a book and this has changed his life I pause at this point to say to you I don't remember this at all and I'm incapable of being useful to anybody but then she says this he has moved to Bondi he has joined a church he has been baptized he has married a Christian lass he is raising a godly family we are encouraged thank you is that not a remarkable piece of feedback on something we do which we don't remember doing and are incapable of doing properly and that's what you do dear friends you pray for somebody you meet with them you sit and have coffee with them you give them something you move off wondering whether any good has taken place and God in his wisdom uses our frail efforts for long lasting good so remember

Jesus is our security our authority and our priority let's thank him and ask him to help us let's bow our heads our gracious God we thank you for this wonderful chapter we thank you for the beauty of the Lord Jesus and the way he taught so thoughtfully wisely wonderfully and clearly we thank you that we find our security in him and having him we have great great security we thank you too that he is our authority that his promises can be stood on forever and we thank you too that he is our priority and we ask that in the midst of this very sad and needy world you would use us even us as we watch and work please take and use us even this day to be useful in your purposes and we ask that you would bear much fruit fruit that lasts through us to your praise in Jesus name amen