**Uniquely Jesus** April 23, 17

Mark 13

Recap.

Sunday - Jesus entered Jerusalem accompanied by thousands of people who welcomed him with shouts of praise.

Monday - he drove the money changers and animal sellers out of the Temple.

Tuesday - he entered into an intense debate with the religious leaders.

At some point on Tuesday afternoon, Jesus left the temple.

This was when one of his disciples said to him – v.1 – *Look Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!*

“Massive stones”

Josephus reported that some of the stones used to build the Temple were 40’ long, 12’ high and 18’ wide. It is guesstimated that just one of these rocks would have weighed somewhere in the vicinity of 150 tons.

“Magnificent buildings.”

The Temple in Jerusalem also had the reputation of being the most beautiful building in the whole world. It was also the largest structure in the surrounding area. Its footprint covered approximately 1/6 of the city of Jerusalem.

What that unnamed disciple said to Jesus is a common response that all of us have experienced when we’ve seen something made by human beings that strikes us as beautiful or awe-inspiring.

The Eiffel Tower

A view of a great city

A magnificent bridge

I’m sure whoever that disciple was, thought the temple would endure for centuries. But Jesus said - v.2 – *“Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.”*

History confirms – nations rise and fall.

We know from experience what the Bible says in James 4:14 is true - our own lives are like a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.

That said, Jesus’ comments that afternoon were more than him trying to emphasize that life on this earth is transient.

Having left the Temple area, Jesus and his followers went to the Mount of Olives.

From there, looking back across the Kidron Valley at the Temple, Peter, James, John and Andrew asked Jesus two questions.

v.4 – When will these things happen?

v.4 – What will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?

The disciples could only imagine the scope of the catastrophe that would have to happen in order for the Temple to be left in ruins.

But before Jesus gave any specific details, he warned them of things that would happen to them, ahead of this catastrophe, because of their allegiance to him.

Two principles of Bible interpretation I need to remind you of.

1. We use Scripture to interpret Scripture. That is, we bring other passages in the Bible alongside the one we are studying in order to rightly understand what is being said. Today we will bring Luke’s gospel alongside Mark’s.
2. Prophecy often has a double fulfillment.

Example: Isaiah 7:10-14.

Now read v.15.

Now read Matthew 1:22-23.

In Mark 13, there was a double fulfillment - events that would happen within 40 years and events that would happen in the distant future before the return of Jesus.

What’s fascinating is that Jesus didn’t distinguish between what will happen soon and what will happen later.

This is why prophecy always needs to be read carefully.

**Read v.5-37.**

Let’s break this dialogue down into smaller chunks - v.5-13.

Example of hiking in the alpine with Wally.

I’m looking around at everything, in awe of what I’m seeing.

But then I noticed that Wally, while admiring the beauty of where we were,

was constantly looking back and forth.

Do you know what he was watching for? Grizzly bears.

Jesus told his disciples you need to be attentive to the threats you will face.

Spiritual deception - v.6

National crises - v.7-8a

Natural disasters - v.8b.

*“The world, Jesus said, was going to be plunged into great crisis. And his followers would be called, like he was, to live at the place where the purposes of God and the pain of the world cross paths.”* Mark for Everyone, p.179

But these were not the events that would destroy the temple.

These were just the beginning of birth pains - v.8.

Remember Braxton-Hicks contractions?

Jesus also told them to be on guard because persecution would come upon them from religious and government leaders, as well as family members - v.9-13. He essentially told them, “The same opposition I’ve faced, will come upon you. You will be arrested, flogged and put on trial before governors and kings.”

But Jesus promised them that special help from the Holy Spirit would be given to them, when this happened.

It sounds crazy!

But according to Jesus, persecution was a strategy that would provide the opportunity for his followers to preach the gospel to all nations.

The book of Acts confirms this; as does church history.

Jesus told his followers about these things, in order that, they might guard their hearts against panic.

To follow him would require of them, patience and endurance.

This teaches us that the Christian life is not a 100-metre dash.

In Eugene Peterson’s words, following Jesus is a long obedience in the same direction.

We may not face the same issues those disciples faced.

But Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount that all of his followers shouldn’t be surprised if they experience insult or are spoken falsely about because of their association with him.

Jesus wants us to follow our faith through to the end.

v.14-27.

In these verses, Jesus answered their second question.

He identified a clear and distinct “sign,” which when it happened would indicate to his followers that the time of the Temple’s destruction had arrived.

What was that sign?

“When you see the abomination that causes desolation...”

This phrase is taken from Daniel 11:31; 12:11.

Daniel’s prophecy had **a double fulfilment.**

In 167 BC, Antiochus IV, who was also called Epiphanes, desecrated the Temple in Jerusalem, by erecting in the holy place, an altar, dedicated to the god Zeus, which in the words from 1 Maccabees 1:54, was “a desolating sacrilege.”

Zeus’ altar was an abomination that caused desolation, and Jesus stated that such a thing would happen again, before the Temple was destroyed.

Jesus had that same day warned the religious leaders about this: *“Look, your house is left to you desolate.”* Matthew 23:38.

In rejecting Jesus, the nation of Israel pursued the path of violent nationalism. And that path, forty years later, brought them to the place of utter ruin.

Here’s what happened.

Josephus wrote: *“Jewish Zealots mobilized and attacked and killed a Roman garrison. This led Emperor Nero to commission Vespasian and his son Titus to end the uprising. From 66-70 A.D., a bitter war was fought.”* patheos.com

In those years of uprising and fighting, the nation was horribly divided.

*“During this time, there were many who claimed to be the Messiah, or a prophet of God, offering rescue, and promising signs and wonders, but all of them came to nothing.”* Mark for Everyone, p.183.

*At the final siege, which lasted five months, four Roman legions surrounded Jerusalem.”* patheos.com

But what was the abomination that caused desolation?

It’s here we need to compare Scripture with Scripture. Luke 21:20-24.

*“On September 7, 70 A.D., Jerusalem was under Roman control. The Roman army then preceded to completely destroy both the city and the Temple.”* patheos.com

Jesus’ counsel to his followers, forty years before any of this happened, was that when they saw armies surrounding Jerusalem, they were to flee.

In v.9-13, he had said to them there is a time to stand one’s ground.

But when Rome’s legions surrounded Jerusalem, that was the time to run.

Why did Jesus draw upon the imagery of cosmic catastrophe – v.24-25 - as he described the destruction of the temple?

Because it would be an unprecedented time of distress.

Tom Wright says, “The only way for Jesus to adequately describe such a time was to use prophetic language from Isaiah 13:10 and 34:4.” Mark for Everyone, p.183.

Those prophetic words from Isaiah had a **double fulfillment.**

> Jesus used them in Mark 13, to describe, the end of Israel as a nation.

> And Jesus also used them to speak of when this present age would come to

an end. Luke 21:25-27 > Mark 13:26-27 > Luke 21:28

Read v.28-31.

“It is near” – v.29.

What is near?

The destruction of the temple...AND...the return of Jesus.

The disciples’ generation would live to see armies surrounding Jerusalem.

But you and I need to understand this - God’s sense of “soon” is different than ours.

Look at 2 Peter 3:3-9

**The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise.**

v.31 – Jesus said, *“my words will never pass away.”*

They are certain; they are authoritative.

They will happen.

God said in Deuteronomy 18:22 that the defining proof a person is a prophet is that what they predict happens. “*If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously, so do not be alarmed.”*

What Jesus said about Jerusalem and the temple did happen in 70 AD. This is the assurance that what he said regarding the end of this age will also happen.

The human tendency with prophecy is to want to figure out precise timings for events and to put specific names on nations and individuals.

But is that what Jesus said to do? No.

What was his counsel to us?

v.32-37.

*“Be on guard!* – v.33. *Be alert!* – v.33. *Keep watch* – v.35. *Watch!* – v.37.

At the cross Jesus won.

And the proof of his victory was the empty tomb!

However, in his sovereignty, God has chosen that in this present time, Jesus will rule from heaven over earth in the midst of his enemies.

The victory of Jesus is certain, but spiritual war is still being fought.

This is why we need to be on guard; to be alert; to keep watch.

We will face subtle and not so subtle pressure to compromise in a myriad of little and not so little ways.

This pressure will be persuasive and unrelenting.

But know this – while Jesus said to be on guard, and to be watchful, he did not mean for us to be afraid; or anxious; or nervous.

It is true that our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Ephesians 6:12. And these unseen spiritual forces will attempt to outwit us.

But this reality is also true - 2 Corinthians 2:11 - *“We are not unaware of Satan’s schemes.”*

Jesus assured us that the Holy Spirit is our Guide and our Teacher – John 16:13.

Jesus told us to pray and to ask the Father to deliver us from the evil one.

As we read and think upon God’s word, the Holy Spirit uses his written word to provide us with discernment based on God’s own perspective and wisdom.

The Scripture gives us this encouragement.

Jesus is near.

Be alert and self-controlled.

Keep watch.

Hold on to the faith.

**The Blessing**

1 Thessalonians 5:9-11

**Life Group Discussion Question: Mark 13:1-37**

**STUDY: MARK 13 © Rosemary Bardsley 2013**

The disciples asked two questions:

When will these things happen?  
What will be the sign that they are about to be fulfilled?

Jesus’ lengthy answer includes references to two distinct events: the destruction of Jerusalem [which occurred in AD70], and the final judgement. Each in their own way could be defined as the end of an age or era. The destruction of the Jerusalem [including the temple] in AD70 brought Judaism as it was then to an end; without the temple, without the holy city, the ability of the Jews to offer sacrifices and keep the feast days was ended. As to the final judgement, that is quite clearly the end of an age – the end of the age in which grace, repentance and salvation are available, and the end of ‘the heavens and the earth’ as they are now.

It is, however, difficult to distinguish which of Jesus’ statements apply to the former and which to the latter, and which were intended to refer to both.

**A. ON-GOING PRELIMINARY SIGNS – Mark 13:5-13**

There are some ‘signs’ that will be present throughout the period leading up the ‘the end’. These signs have been in evidence throughout the Christian era. This era, which began with the first coming of Jesus Christ, is referred to as ‘these last days’ in Hebrews 1:2. We are in ‘the last days’, but not yet at ‘the last day’.

**Task #1: Make a list of these continuing preliminary signs from Mark 13:5-8**

**Task #2: The persecution, betrayal and hatred of Christians – Mark 13:9-13**  
Included in these on-going preliminary signs is the official persecution [both political and religious] of those who follow Jesus Christ.

**List the expression of this persecution in verses 9-11.**

*Notes:* [1] Jesus’ instructions to his disciples when he first sent them out on mission was to move on to the next town or village when the village they were in rejected them and their message. [2] That this kind of practice continued is evident in Paul’s missionary journeys where persecution in one town meant that he moved on to the next and preached there.

**How did Jesus describe the betrayal and hatred of Christians [verses 12,13]?**

Jesus taught that this on-going persecution by religious and political authorities was not the only rejection that Christians would face during the church age. Such hatred and rejection of Christians would arise within families that those who were believers would be betrayed by their own family – their brothers, their parents, their children.

**THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM – Mark 13:14-20**

In Mark 13:14-20 Jesus predicts the destruction of Jerusalem in AD70, and the difficulty that will be experienced at that time. However, some of his warnings have universal and on-going relevance and application.

**Task #3: Read Mark 13:14-23 and answer these questions:**

[1] What does Jesus mean by ‘the abomination of desolation’?

[2] How does Jesus communicate the urgent need to flee?

[3] How does Jesus communicate the horror of what will happen?

[4] What evidence is there of God’s grace and love in the midst of this judgement?

[5] How does Jesus refer to the powerful spiritual deception that will occur?

[6] Suggest which of these signs is specific to the fall of Jerusalem, and which have broader application.

**The abomination of desolation – Mark 13:14**

The phrase refers back to Daniel where it is mentioned three times. Daniel, like Revelation, is written in apocalyptic style – the real message disguised behind symbolic imagery because prevailing persecution made clearly stated teaching a dangerous thing. The context of Daniel’s description of the abomination includes:

The destruction of Jerusalem and the temple [9:26].  
An extended war [9:26; 11:33].  
The end of sacrifice and offering [9:27; 11:31; 12:11].  
The desecration of the temple [11:31].  
The violation of the covenant [11:32].

This was first fulfilled by the actions of the Greek [Seleucid] King Antiochus Epiphanes in and around 168BC. He outlawed the practice of Jewish religion, making participation in certain Jewish rituals punishable by death; he erected a pagan idol in the temple and sacrificed unclean animals on the altar; he burned and pillaged a large section of Jerusalem, and killed many of its inhabitants; he robbed the temple of various items of sacred furniture used in the Jewish rituals.

However, the temple itself was not destroyed at that time. The final destruction of the temple occurred when it was burnt in AD70 by the Roman army under Titus who led the attack against Jerusalem. At the same time much of Jerusalem was destroyed and over a million of its inhabitants killed. Almost one hundred thousand others were made slaves. Others fled to the surrounding countries. Here, as with the previous assault in 168BC, we see the fulfilment of the Daniel prophecies. While no idol was set up in the temple at this time, the holy place and the most holy place were profaned by the entry of the pagan Gentile Romans, carrying their images on their staves, and seeking, handling and taking the golden objects dedicated to the worship of the LORD.

In both attacks sacrifices are stopped: in the first by the decree outlawing the practice of the Jewish religion; in the second by the complete destruction of the temple. It resumed in the interim between the two, but because the temple has not been rebuilt since the AD70 destruction, sacrifices and other Jewish religious practices dependent on the temple and its sacred objects have never been resumed.

**The urgency and the horror – Mark 13:14-20**  
Jesus expresses terribly urgent need for immediate escape. There is no time to do anything except to immediately run in order to barely escape with one’s life. The impending calamity is horrendous – it will mean exposure to the elements; it will mean having to flee on foot and in haste; it will mean great distress and hardship. This is true of both Antiochus Epiphanes’ and Titus’ attacks, but more so of Titus’.  It is fairly safe to say that Jesus is here predicting the second fulfilment of Daniel’s prophecies. He told the disciples that the temple would be destroyed [13:2] and they asked him when it would happen and what would be the signs.

**Something to think about**  
We have seen that there are two distinct fulfilments of Daniel’s prophecies. One before Jesus, and one after Jesus. It is obvious that Jesus was indeed referring to the fall of Jerusalem in AD70 when he responded to the disciples’ questions. His answers are reported in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21. Luke specifically mentions Jerusalem and its destruction [Luke 21:20,24], and Mark includes reference to ‘all who are in Judea’ fleeing to the mountains. This tribulation is clearly something local in Judea.

But we need to ask: is anything more than that intended? Are there more levels at which at least some of Jesus’ teaching in Mark 13:14-20 that is already fulfilled but is also yet to be fulfilled? It is fairly common to also apply Mark 13:14-20 to the ‘end of the world’ – that is, to the return of Jesus Christ when he comes to judge the world, and to the intense suffering that will precede that final event. The geographically limited micro fulfilment of Jesus’ teaching in the destruction of Jerusalem is a foretaste, a foreshadowing, of the ultimate, macro, global fulfilment that will occur at the end of all things.

**ON-GOING SPIRITUAL DECEPTION – Mark 13:21-23**

Jesus twice warned about the presence of false Christs – firstly in verse 5-6 as part of the preliminary and on-going signs, then again in verses 21-23 as part of the trouble when Jerusalem was destroyed, and also as something that will occur in the days following that distress and right up to the cosmic signs that will usher in the coming of the Son of Man [verse 24].

That this spiritual deception will persist between the two comings of Christ is evident in multiple references throughout the New Testament. Here in Mark 13 it includes the following:

It is very powerful – *many* are deceived.  
Its messengers claim either to be the Christ or to know that the Christ has returned and where he is.  
It has its own false Christs and false prophets.  
It is engaged in powerful and deceptive signs and miracles.

**AT THE END – Mark 13:24-27**

The return of the Son of Man at the very end of the age will be:

Accompanied by signs in the heavens [verses 24,25]  
In the clouds with great power and glory [26]

At that time he will send his angels and gather his elect from the everywhere [verse 27]. Matthew 24:37-41 includes additional details of Jesus’ teaching at this point.

**FOCUS ON GOD’S ELECT IN MARK 13**

It is important to remember that Jesus was speaking to his disciples when he gave this teaching. Indeed Mark tells us that it was given in response to a question from Peter, James, John and Andrew [13:3]. [Matthew simply says ‘the disciples’, while Luke says ‘some of the disciples’.] The teaching and the warnings were given to disciples. It is not public teaching warning everyone about the things to come.

It is the disciples who are warned not to be deceived.  
It is the disciples who are warned of coming persecution, betrayal and hatred.  
It is the disciples who are warned not to worry what they will say when on trial.  
It is the disciples who are warned to flee from Jerusalem.  
It is the disciples who are warned to pray it won’t take place in winter.

But there is more than that here. Three times ‘the elect’ are mentioned:

[1] Jesus said that ‘no one would survive’ if the Lord had not cut short the days of suffering for the elect’s sake [Mark 13:20].

The concept of God sparing a community because of the presence of God’s elect is evident in Abraham’s intercession on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah on the basis of Lot’s presence in Sodom [see Genesis 18:16-33].

God’s commitment to limit ‘temptation’ to what believers are able to bear [1Corinthians 10:11-13] is also relevant here. A key meaning in ‘temptation’ is the concept of ‘pressure’ – the pressure to give in and give up on God – something certainly present in persecution and suffering.

[2] Jesus also said that the spiritual deception is so powerful that it would ‘deceive the elect – if that were possible’ [verse 22]. This assures us that it is not possible for God’s ‘elect’ to be deceived in a final way. That the elect are deceived in a way that is not final is obvious from the many New Testament letters that were written because churches had been infiltrated by false teaching, and the writers call the believers away from those errors and back to the truth.

[3] The Son of Man will gather his elect [verse 26,27]. They are removed from the earth, not before the time of global suffering, but before the final end.

**Task #4: Identify the warnings in these verses from Mark 13:**

13:5-6

13:7:

13:9:

13:11:

13:13:

13:14-16:

13:18:

13:21-23:

13:28,29:

13:33-36:

Apart from those specifically relating to the destruction of Jerusalem and the urgent necessity to flee and to pray, most of these warnings are warnings to watch and to be on guard. The reason for this is twofold: the powerful and pervasive presence of spiritual deception, and the unknown time of the second coming. 

**THE UNANSWERED QUESTION**

Jesus has answered the second part of the disciples’ question, the question about signs of the end. He has given a multi-layered answer, mentioning signs that are so continual that none of them can give any definite indication that the end in about to happen.

The one sign that Jesus did give that indicates the beginning of the end  - the disruption of heavenly bodies – is so much a part of the end that by the time it appears the end is already upon us.

This lack of specific information accessible via the signs is deliberate, because the actual time of the end is known and knowable only by the Father. It is useless for us to try to pin down the time of the end. Any attempt to do so, on the basis of the signs given by Christ, will result in disappointment. Jesus did say a number of things that relate to the time of his return:

[1] ‘*The gospel must be preached to all nations*’ [verse 10]. This speaks of a divine necessity. The end will not come until this has happened. But this still leaves the end uncertain … for how can any human know when God considers that a nation has had adequate preaching of the gospel? Related to this we know that people from ‘every tribe and language and people and nation’ will be redeemed by the blood of the Lamb of God [Revelation 5:9]. This indicates that not only every ‘nation’, but every people group and every language group within the nations, must first hear the gospel preached, before the end will come.

[2] ‘… *this generation will certainly not pass away* until all these things have happened’ [verse 30]. The phrase ‘this generation’ has several possible meanings:

The *actual generation* of people alive when Jesus spoke. If this is the meaning, then it is a reference only to the fall of Jerusalem in AD70.

The *Jewish ‘race*’ which has survived, and still survives, despite incredible odds. If this is the meaning, then Jesus is referring to his second coming, and the end of all things.

The *godless and unbelieving* – who rejected him and would continue to reject him until the end of all things.

The *generation of the righteous* – meaning that there will always be some believers right up to the end of all things.

Apart from the first, which would give a time limit to the fulfilment of Jesus’ words, none of the above help us to identify a specific time for the end.

[3] *No one knows the day or the hour* – except the Father [verse 32]. It is not our business to try to set the day.

[4] Given that we can never know the day of the end prior to its occurrence, the thing that we all have to do, the thing that is required of us, is not that we should try to identify the day, but that *we should at all times be on guard, be alert, and keep watch* [verses 32-37]. It could be any day. It could be today.

https://godswordforyou.com/bible-studies/gospel-of-mark/802-mark-131-37.html