

Awake and Alert

Mark 13:1-37; November 7, 2021

Introduction:

- Today we're going to cover all of chapter 13 known as the Olivet Discourse (cf. Matt. 24:1-25:46; Luke 21:5-36). We've got our work cut out for us for multiple reasons:
 - First, we've got 37 verses to cover (so be gracious with me knowing that I won't be able to do a deep dive on everything).
 - Second, it's one of the most perplexing chapters in the Bible to understand.
- It's perplexing because Jesus weaves together in his teaching upcoming historical events and his return at the end of the age.
- Secret: in HS I was a part of a church band in my youth group called "Second Coming."
- The Why:
 - His return is something that we should all long watch for and long for.
 - Whether you're a follower of Jesus or not, there is what I'll call an "eschatological longing" inside of you (eschatology is the study of the last things/end times).
 - We all know that this world is not as it ought to be.
 - Twitter feeds, news channels, are constantly filled with the brokenness of our world.
 - The good news of the gospel is that God SEES and God CARES! He's committed to bringing restoration to his new creation. WHEN?

Transition: that's what our passage is about today and the first few verses of Mark frame this question for us.

Read Mark 13:1-4.

Context: These four verses provide us with a number of hermeneutical keys to understanding this passages:

- The Temple
 - This passage comes at the end of the "temple material" (Mark 11-13).
 - Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem
 - Cleansing and Cursing the Temple
 - Questioning in the Temple by the Religious Leaders (Chief Priests, Scribes, Elders, Pharisees, Herodians, Sadducees).
 - Teaching in the Temple
 - The role of the Temple:
 - The Jewish people believed the temple was the sanctuary of God and would remain until the end of the age.
 - Jesus' teaching and interactions in the temple have alluded to a change that was coming on the horizon and Jesus now makes that explicit. This temple will be destroyed.

- And it was: Titus, the son of the emperor Vespasian, led the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in AD 66-70.
- So, it's the destruction of the temple that is the background for Jesus' teaching about the end times and his return.
- The Disciples' Questions:
 - When will these things be?
 - TIMING of the destruction of the temple.
 - What will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?
 - This second question though has an eschatological ring to it and this is confirmed as we read the rest of the passage.
 - The disciples connect the destruction of the temple with the end of the world. In their minds, these were "a single complex web of events" (D. A. Carson).
 - Additionally, they probably didn't expect a long interval between the destruction of the temple and the end of the age.

The Six Act Drama of Scripture (Graphic)

- Let's step back and remind ourselves of the story of the Bible:
 - Creation, Fall, Israel, Jesus, Church, New Creation

The Tension of this Passage:

- The near event: the destruction of Jerusalem (AD 70).
- The far event: the return and Second Coming of the Son of Man.
- The former, near and local event, is a forerunner to the latter, worldwide event.
 - Often times in the OT the prophets would predict a "far" future event in terms of a "near" future event.
 - In other words, the destruction of the temple functions as a paradigm for the Second Coming of Jesus.
- The challenge of our passage is that at times these two different events are so tightly interwoven that it's hard to separate them.

Transition:

- The rest of this chapter is Jesus answering their questions, dealing primarily with the 2nd question, and calling them to remain faithful as disciples while they wait and watch.
- Over and over we are going to see that Jesus calls his disciples to alertness and faithfulness in the present instead of rampant speculation regarding the future.

Read Mark 13:5-23.

Transition: The first truth that Jesus challenges his disciples with is...

I. By the Spirit, Expect and Endure Deception, Persecution, and Tribulation (1-23).

Mark 13:6-13 describes the experience of the church following Jesus' ascension.

- "You" initially refers to the immediate disciples but extends beyond to include all the followers Jesus will have.
- We're not told how long this period will last but we are told it is an interim period. It will not last forever.
- Jesus teaches his disciples that this interim period is a part of God's plan.

Transition: The focus is on present faithfulness, not future speculation.

- "See that no one leads you astray" (5).
- "Do not be alarmed" (7).
- "But be on your guard" (9).
- "Do not be anxious..." (11).
- "But be on guard" (23).

But threats to faithfulness and discipleship will come from many different areas.

Deception (5-6)

- The greatest threats might not be external but internal.
- There will be false christs.
 - D. A. Carson notes, "One of the greatest temptations in times of difficulty is to follow blindly any self-proclaimed savior who promises help" (Carson).
- How do you protect yourself from deception?
 - Ask: Is this person helping me to know and follow God and make much of Jesus or are they merely using the Bible and God for ulterior purposes?
 - Know God's Word. Study it. Read it. Commit to always be growing as a disciple (cf. Eph. 4:11-16).

Initial Tribulation (7-8)

- Types of tribulation on believers and non-believers.
 - Wars and rumors of wars
 - Nation against nation
 - Kingdom against kingdom
 - Earthquakes
 - Famines
- These are the "beginning of the birth pains"
 - This metaphor implies increasing frequency and duration of these events.
 - This period of tribulation extends the entire period between Jesus' first and second comings (cf. Rom. 8:20-21).

Persecution (9-13)

- Threats to faithfulness and discipleship will also come through persecution.
 - Delivered over to councils
 - Beaten in synagogues

- Stand before governors and kings.
- Family strife
 - Brothers killing brothers
 - Fathers killing children
 - Children killing parents
- Ironically, these persecutions don't hinder but rather provide opportunity for the spread of the kingdom and witness among the nations.
 - "To bear witness before them" (10).
 - "And the gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations" (11).
 - While all of this could summarize every age and generation, much of what has been described so far particularly describes the early church in Acts.
 - Acts 4:1-30; 7:59-8:3; 12:1-5; 23:33; 25:6, 19ff; 28:22.
 - Over and over, we see the early church in Acts grow in their boldness to share Jesus and the repeated phrase that they were "full of the Holy Spirit."
 - Everyday, Spirit-led witnesses
 - Surrender daily to the leadership of the Holy Spirit.
 - The mission and task of the church is to make disciples who make disciples among the nations.
 - One temptation the older RHC gets that every church faces the older that they get is to become insular and inward focused.
 - Jesus will not return until this mission and task is complete.
 - We must keep the Great Commandment and the Great Commission at the center of RHC. Gospel, Community, Mission.
- "Don't be anxious"
 - God will not abandon us but will rather empower us.
- The importance of perseverance
 - God never promises that we will be exempt from trials and tribulations. He does promise to give the grace we need to remain steadfast and endure trials and tribulations.
 - "Perseverance is the proof that our profession is real. It may be tough, but our Lord will be faithful to keep us by His power" (Danny Akin).

"And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: the ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy. And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away."
(Mark 4:16-17, ESV)

The Abomination of Desolation (14-18)

- What is "the abomination of desolation"?
 - The expression occurs four times in Daniel: 8:13; 9:27; 11:31; 12:11.
 - Most scholars agree that the initial fulfillment refers to the desecration of Antiochus Epiphanes in 168 BC when he erected an altar to Zeus on the altar of burnt offering in the temple and then sacrificed a pig on it (cf. 1 Mac. 1:54).

- This past event (168 BC) is recalled as a paradigm or symbol of something equally outrageous to occur in the future.
- In other words, that past event did not completely fulfill Daniel's prophecy. It only partially did. There is more fulfillment still to come.
- What event are we to understand "the abomination of desolation" referring to?
 - Most commentators agree that Jesus is pointing to another fulfillment in the upcoming destruction of the temple by Titus that will happen in AD 70.
 - The instructions in vv.14-18 are so specific that Jesus must be referring to this near event (so Carson).
 - This is a shocking reversal!!!
 - Instead of Isaiah's glorious hope, Jerusalem faces a judgment that is even greater than in the days of Antiochus Epiphanes.
 - But there seems to be more than this going on. These two partial fulfillments anticipate a climactic event of destruction by the Antichrist just before the Second Coming of Jesus (cf. 2 Thess. 2).
 - The destruction of Jerusalem functions as a type of the last judgment, which will occur when Jesus returns.

Great Tribulation (19-23)

- What does v. 19 refer to? The Great Tribulation
 - The destruction of Jerusalem (so Carson).
 - Carson would say there have been greater numbers of deaths (Holocaust, Stalin) but never so high a percentage of a great city's population so thoroughly and painfully exterminated and enslaved.
 - A Great Tribulation period at the end of the age (so Edwards).
- What does v. 20-23 refer to?
 - A specific period of great tribulation right before the return of Jesus.
 - This age will become so bad that no one would survive if God didn't cut short the days.
 - The fall of Jerusalem is a prototype of this future cataclysmic period.
- "Elect": all true believers:
 - Again, trust God's sovereign hand and plan.
 - The "if possible" refers to the intent of the deceivers: they intend to deceive, if possible, even the elect—without any comment on how ultimately successful such attacks will be (so Carson; cf. Mark 14:35).
- "False Christs and False Prophets"
 - Signs and wonders alone are not clear indicators of God's approval, presence or will.
- "Pay Attention!!!" "Keep Watch!!!"
 - Faithfulness, not foretelling, is the key to discipleship.
 - Don't become complacent or apathetic.

Read Mark 13:24-31.

Transition: The second truth that Jesus challenges his disciples with is...

II. Anticipate the Glorious Return of Jesus (24-31).

The Coming of the Son of Man (24-27).

- What is described here is the consummation of our hope.
- Jesus has accomplished redemption. Now he is returning to complete redemption.
- Jesus will return to condemn evil, end all suffering and death and gather us to himself.
- The description of Jesus' return echoes numerous Scriptures. The point?
 - Our hope is grounded in the Scriptures and Jesus is the fulfillment of those Scriptures.
- Cosmic, earth-shattering events and upheaval
 - The sun will be darkened (see Rev. 6:12; cf. Gen. 1:2).
 - The moon will not give its light (see Rev. 6:12).
 - The stars (perhaps meteorites) will be falling from heaven
 - The powers in the heavens will be shaken (see Rev. 6:13-14).
 - Jesus is coming to bring a New Heavens and a New Earth.
- A fulfillment of Dan. 7:13-14

"I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed." (Daniel 7:13-14, ESV)

- The "clouds" symbolize God's presence and glory and thus this means that God's presence and glory is now not located in the temple but in Jesus.
- These cosmic realities are probably meant to be taken literally.
- You will not be able to miss Jesus' return. It will be public and unquestionable. He will be visible to everyone. He will be as visible as lightning in a thunderstorm.

"After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" (Revelation 7:9-10, ESV)

"And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God." (Revelation 21:3, ESV)

The Lesson of the Fig Tree (28-31).

- Jesus sees in the fig tree a good metaphor for the nearness of the end.
 - When you see the leaves on the fig tree, you know summer is near.
 - It signals *that* summer is coming, not exactly *when* summer is coming.
- “These things” focuses our attention back on the signs of the period of tribulation and the fall of Jerusalem as described in vv. 5-23, not the Second Coming of Jesus from vv. 24-27.
- Based on this interpretation, the generation Jesus is referring to is that of his own, those who lived to witness the destruction of the temple and the fall of Jerusalem.
 - Jesus doesn’t say the tribulation must end during this time period, only that it must happen within it.
 - Thus, Jesus did not mistakenly teach that his return would occur within his hearers’ lifetime.
- It may help you to think of the time period including Jesus’ first and second coming as part of one event (the Incarnation, Crucifixion, Resurrection, Ascension and Second Coming).
 - They are all part of the same mountain range that can be viewed together at a distance.
 - In this sense, we are living in the last days.
 - “[I]t means that the end is imminent in the sense that it is the next thing on the divine calendar” (Darrell Bock).
- When Jesus returns, he will usher in a New Heaven and a New Earth.

Read Mark 13:32-37.

Transition: The third truth that Jesus challenges his disciples with is...

III. Trust your Good, Sovereign and Wise Father (32-37).

Knowledge of the end exceeds knowability.

- “No one knows.”
- Angels do not know.
- The Son does not know.
 - This statement only makes sense in light of the incarnation: fully God and fully man.
 - Jesus learned things (cf. Luke 2:52; Heb. 5:8) and on the other hand he had infinite knowledge (cf. John 2:25; 16:30; 21:17).
 - Here Jesus is speaking in terms of his human nature
 - He grew and became strong (cf. Luke 2:40).
 - He increased in stature (cf. Luke 2:52).
 - He got weary (cf. John 4:6), thirsty (John 19:28), hungry (Matt. 4:2).
 - He was crucified (1 Cor. 2:8).
 - For a time he relinquished the free exercise of his divine attributes such as

omniscience.

- “How Jesus could have limited knowledge and yet know all things is difficult, and much remains a mystery, for nobody else has ever been both God and man. One possibility is that Jesus regularly lived on the basis of his human knowledge but could at any time call to mind anything from his infinite knowledge” (ESV Study Bible).
- Cf. Phil. 2:6-11
- The disciples want a sign but Jesus trusts a Father.
- Jesus is an example for us to follow.
- We relinquish the future fully into the Father’s hands.

The Father knows.

- Even when there is deception, persecution, tribulation, even great tribulation, the Father is still reigning as a Good, Sovereign and Wise Father and he is in complete control.
- You can trust him.
- You shouldn’t spend your energy and time trying to set dates and predict the return of Jesus.

Be on guard, stay awake and be faithful.

- The doorkeepers’ *only* job was to watch and be ready.
- We are like doorkeepers. Our only job is to wait and watch.
 - Mark includes the four Roman watches of the night (evening, midnight, rooster, morning).
 - Do you remember what Jesus told his disciples to do in the Garden of Gethsemane?
 - Watch and Pray.
- The End is “not a ‘then’ but a mysteriously present *now*” (Edwards).
- We’ve got work to do: The Great Commission.

The Point: Be on guard and alert so you are not deceived or anxious about the ends times but rather long for the return of Jesus.

- This is the main point of the Olivet discourse. It’s not so much to inform us but to admonish us.
- There are some things God has not revealed to us...but there’s much he has revealed to us. Our focus should be on longing for the return of Jesus while we strive to obey his clearly revealed will.

Conclusion