

Sign of the Times, Mark 13:24-37, Time to Be Watchful, 1/29/23

During family dinner this week, for some reason the new series “The Last of Us” came up, which is about 2 survivors in a post-virus America and, of course, zombies... and Nathan said, “If I hear about another show about the apocalypse, I’m going to explode.” There are a lot of them aren’t there? Pop-culture is obsessed with the end of the world. Whether it’s brought on by zombies, aliens, climate change, nuclear war, a supervillain, or a virus- it’s everywhere. I think these shows are so popular partly because it doesn’t see that far-fetched these days. Doesn’t this world feel like a tinder box at times? Like it’s hanging on by a thread? Maybe every generation says that about the next one. But most of us have woken up to the reality that utopia isn’t coming through technology, science, evolution, being green and definitely not through a political movement. Now that doesn’t mean we throw our hands up in the air and turn into a grumpy old man who just rants and complains about how our society is going to hell in a handbasket. But what it ought to create is a longing for a completely new life and society and planet as we know it... a longing for the return of King Jesus. And this is where Jesus is ultimately heading at the conclusion of the Olivet Discourse we’ve been studying in Mark 13.

Throughout his teaching, he has been preparing his disciples for his 2nd coming, but the emphasis has been on how to live in the in between, in the present...within the tension of everyday life in a broken world and the reality that Jesus could return at any moment. In v.1-8 he prepares them to discern the false signs of his return like wars, natural disasters. In v. 9-13 he prepares them to expect persecution for their faith and to be resilient. Last week in 14-23, he prepares them with to see the sign of the times at the coming destruction of the temple and ultimately his return. Now in verses 24-37 he will paint a word picture of how it is all going to go down to usher in the end, but what he’s most concerned about is that we as disciples today are prepared for his return. And that’s where we will ultimately land the plane today.

And so the outline for us today is going to have two parts, and I want to borrow REM’s 1987 hit *It’s the End of the World as we know it...and I feel Fine*...except I’m going to change it to Prepared to fit the sermon.

²⁴ *“But in those days, following that distress... Jesus is talking about after the great tribulation we talked about last week at the end of time. “the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; ²⁵ the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.”*

²⁶ *At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.*

²⁷ *And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.* Now to truly understand this text, we really need to spend a few minutes doing Eschatology 101 with Professor Keeler. You are coming to seminary with me. In OT prophecy there is a repeated phrase called *The Day of the Lord*, and it is relevant here because Jesus is quoting a variety of “Day of the Lord” prophecies from the OT. Let me take you to one that is very clear, turn to Isaiah 13 in your Bibles. This is a prophecy against the

Babylonian Empire around 700BC given by Isaiah the prophet of Israel. In this prophecy God is proclaiming his coming judgment upon the empire for their wickedness, *Isaiah 13:9-10, See, the day of the Lord is coming —a cruel day, with wrath and fierce anger— to make the land desolate and destroy the sinners within it.*

¹⁰ The stars of heaven and their constellations will not show their light. The rising sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light.

13 Therefore I will make the heavens tremble; and the earth will shake from its place. Look familiar, almost identical language Jesus is using. Look at how this will happen- *v.4-5 The Lord Almighty is mustering an army for war.⁵ They come from faraway lands, from the ends of the heavens— the Lord and the weapons of his wrath— to destroy the whole country.* Again, look familiar? Jesus says he's gathering his angels and elect from the four ends of the earth and heavens. Now in the case of the Isaiah 13, the army that God gathers to bring judgment upon Babylon we see in verse 17, was a people known as the Medes. And we see this in history, 70 years after this prophecy in 614BC, God in his sovereign power, uses the Mede army to conquer the Babylonian Empire and take over...

One more Day of the Lord prophecy, *Daniel 7 ¹³ "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence.*

¹⁴ He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed. Again, look familiar? Jesus is identifying himself as the Son of Man of Daniel who is coming in the clouds with power and glory, to bring his kingdom reign forever and ever.

So what can we learn about the "Day of the Lord" prophecies in the OT that help us understand Jesus' words here? *#1 Displays God's just judgment against wickedness.* This is important to see this in Jesus' words about the end times. The second coming of Jesus will not be time of rejoicing for many on the planet. He's coming to destroy evil and all wickedness. What Jesus describes here in just a few sentences, Revelation 19 describes in vivid detail. Jesus riding into battle on a white war horse with a sword in his mouth and an army of heaven...wild.

Now I realize that this kind of imagery of Jesus may feel unsettling, because often we prefer to only think of Jesus in terms of meek and mild, peace and love, holding babies. And he is all of those things. But the second coming of Christ shall be utterly unlike the first. He came the first time in weakness, with peace, to bear our sins as our suffering servant. He shall come the second time in power, with justice, with the armies of heaven as our conquering king. That means some of us need to take Jesus out of our box we have him in.

#2 Jesus is coming to Rule Forever. The Day of the Lord is a day of terror for those who are in rebellion against God, those who are enemies of Jesus. But it is a day of rejoicing for those who

see him as their king. We have nothing to fear about this coming day if you are in Christ. Revelation 20-21 describe his reign as one that will end all pain, all tears, all war, all injustice, all conflict, all sin...where we will become the people we always dreamed we could be, and most importantly, we will be with our Savior forever and ever. The old order of the earth under the curse of sin and death will be removed and replaced by the new order of heaven, the world our souls all long for.

So it's the end of the world as we know it...and I feel Prepared. Now Jesus is going to prepare us for his return using two parables. For the sake of time I will summarize the first because the lesson is really basic- in verses 28-31, just as a fig tree shows signs in the spring that the fruit is coming in the summer, so the signs will be in place just before the destruction of the temple and the end of time. That is how I take v.30, that this generation will not pass away before it happens. The disciples' generation in 30AD, and the generation that experiences the end of times in the future.

And then he gives us a second parable, ³² *"But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³ Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come.*

³⁴ *It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.*

³⁵ *"Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn.*

³⁶ *If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. ³⁷ What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!'"*

Have any of you been caught sleeping when you are supposed to be awake? Maybe you've fallen asleep on the job, or you fell asleep while driving, I once fell asleep over the phone while my girlfriend was telling me about a bad day she had...we broke up. Some of you fall asleep in church. Pastor Matthew when he was a kid fell asleep while his dad was preaching in the front row and his dad made a big scene about it.

2 Ways Not to Be Caught Sleeping

#1 Wake up to reality: You are going to die or Christ will return: what will happen to you? As we have already seen, for those alive Christ's return is either the greatest moment of your life or the worst moment of your life. C.S. Lewis from his essay *The World's Last Night* "The doctrine of the Second Coming has failed, so far as we are concerned, if it does not make us realize that at every moment of every year in our lives dons the question **'What if this present were the world's last night?'** We can, perhaps, train ourselves to ask more and more often how the thing which we are saying or doing (or failing to do) at each moment will look when the irresistible light streams in upon it; that light which is so different from the light of this world — and yet, even now, we know just enough of it to take it into account. Women sometimes have

the problem of trying to judge by artificial light how a dress will look by daylight. That is very like the problem of all of us: **to dress our souls not for the electric lights of the present world but for the daylight of the next. The good dress is the one that will face that light. For that light will last forever.**"¹

Don't be fooled thinking you can live however you want because you have all the time in the world. Don't be fooled into thinking the dress you are wearing- the dress of popularity, success, money, morality, ambition, your appearance will be the dress that can face the light of eternity. So how do we dress for eternity? We must put on Christ.

I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the father, except through me. There is only one who can speak on your behalf, and that is Christ. There is only one mediator between God and man, and that is the man Christ Jesus. If you're outside of Christ today, you're playing with your eternity. You're rolling the dice for another Sunday. "I'll get another chance. I'll do it next time, once I get rid of this, once I finish that," once this, that, the next thing. The devil loves that stuff. His favorite word is *tomorrow*. The Bible always says, "Today is the day of salvation."²

#2 Wake up to your Purpose

v.34 He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch. This parable is for us- after his death and resurrection, after he accomplished his purpose on Earth, Jesus left this world, and left us his mission and the responsibility to live out that mission, each assigned our own task- our own calling, gifting, a way he designed us to uniquely live that out. And he says, get busy about the task!

This week I spoke separately with two talented, bright, accomplished women, in both cases we talked about purpose in life, but they were walking very different paths. Both were busy, both had full schedules, but one was living within her purpose, and the other outside of her purpose. One was seeking the wisdom of God in his Word and in prayer to discover her purpose and the other was seeking the world and her own desires to live the American dream. One had clarity and intentionality, the other fog and disorientation. One was filled with joy and excitement and peace as she pursued God's purpose, the other was filled with anxiety and fear, having no clue why she was here.

Life is incredibly short, far too short to be wasted. Do you know why you are here? Do you know why God made you? To what end? For what tasks? For what people? Awaken to your purpose. Discover it in the Word, pray, get busy doing the things of the Lord and he will guide you to that end.

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b0LfCtPE8Z4>

² Thanks to Alistair Begg sermon on Mark 13:24-37 for some of this content