The Gospel of Mark

Walking with the Servant Saviour

Lesson 17
Mark 13:1–37

Day One: Be Ready and Waiting!

Jesus was preparing His disciples to be able to live and minister in a world that would remain hostile to them because of their belief in Him. By the time Mark's Gospel was written, the Gentile believers were under great persecution from Rome. The record of Jesus' instructions found here would continue to provide encouragement and comfort to believers everywhere, including up to the present age. Four times Jesus says, *"Take heed!"* and to *"Watch!"* as those who love Him await His coming. The warnings are even more applicable to believers today than when they were penned because we are much closer to the Lord's return!

Read Mark 13:1-13.

Jesus made His last visit to the Temple; He gave His last public address before His arrest and crucifixion. Leaving the city to return to Bethany for the night, Jesus and His men crossed the Kidron valley, heading up the slopes of the Mount of Olives. The prophet Zechariah predicted that the Messiah would one day stand upon this mountain when He returned to set up His kingdom (see Zechariah 14:1–4). This was the setting for a sermon that grew out of a series of questions asked by the disciples; questions that prompted Jesus to teach on what has become known as the Olivet Discourse.

As Jesus was leaving the Temple, one of the disciples commented on the impressiveness of the buildings.

1. What startling reply did Jesus make? vv. 1–2

Privately Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked Jesus when these things would take place. (This time Andrew was added to the *inner circle*; these were the first four disciples Jesus had called to follow Him into the ministry—see Mark 1:16–20.)

2. What is the first warning Jesus gives—why? vv. 5–6

   - ❖ What word of comfort does He offer—why? v. 7

   - ❖ What are the early signs of these sorrows to come? v. 8

The word for *sorrows* in the Greek means *birth pangs;* meaning that just as labor pains signal the end of pregnancy, so these events would signal the end of the present age. Jesus explained that much suffering would take place on the earth before His return, and it would not happen soon after His resurrection or after the destruction of Jerusalem. These events were a necessary part of God's plan and His ultimate goal, which is the creation of a new heaven and a new earth.

Looking closer . . .

Revelation 21:1–4 tells us what awaits believers in the future. What do you personally glean from this passage today?

3. What is the next word of caution Jesus gives—why? v. 9

   - ❖ What must take place before His return? v. 10

4. Jesus states in verse 11 that the preaching of the gospel will result in persecution. What word of comfort does He offer when that takes place? Who does the speaking?

The persecutions facing Christians will ultimately, for some, result in betrayal by family members and even death (v.12). It is comforting to know that though others may forsake those who follow Christ, the Holy Spirit will never leave; He will always stay with us no matter how difficult the circumstances.

5. Jesus' words point to the time toward the end when hatred of Christians will become prevalent. Why will they be hated by the world? v. 13

- ❖ What will happen to the one who endures to the end?

It is the absolute assurance of salvation that keeps Christians going through times of persecution. Some will suffer for their faith and some will even die, but all of those who belong to Christ will be saved for eternal life with Him!

Selah . . . (Pause and think about it.)

Jesus warned His followers about the future so that we can be prepared for living in the present. What does He want *you* to do *now*?

Heartbeat . . . (Memory verse) *"Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is."* Mark 13:33

Day Two: The Great Tribulation

What to look for . . .

The disciples had asked Jesus what sign to look for to know when all of these things would be fulfilled (v. 4). His answer to that question is found in today's passage. The *abomination of desolation* (v.14) is a reference to an event in the second century B.C. when King Antiochus Epiphanes of Syria committed an act of sacrilege by sacrificing a pig on the temple altar. During the Tribulation, the antichrist will also commit the *abomination of desolation*, desecrating the Temple by erecting an image of himself and demanding that it be worshipped.

Read Mark 13:14-23.

The key phrase in this passage, the *abomination of desolation,* is derived from the Book of Daniel (see 9:27 and 11:31). The word *abomination* suggests something that is detestable to God; while *desolation* suggests that the people who come to worship will no longer do so but will flee because of the sacrilege (v. 14).

1. The act of desecration referred to here will be committed by the Antichrist midway during the seven-year tribulation period. What act will he commit according to 2 Thessalonians 2:3–4?

The *abomination* will signal the beginning of the Great Tribulation (the final three and a half years).

(Note: The phrase *let the reader understand* in verse 14 suggests that Jesus was addressing His warnings to a future generation of Christians.)

2. Jesus issues several warnings in verses 14–16, what are they?

   - ❖ Those who are in Judea—
   - ❖ *No one on the roof—*
   - ❖ *No one in the field—*

Jesus emphasized the urgency of the coming crisis to make His point that time was of the essence, not a moment could be wasted.

3. Who did Jesus single out as being particularly vulnerable? v. 17 Why?

   - ❖ What season would be especially hard for those on the run?

4. In your own words, describe what those days will be like. vv. 19–20

- ❖ In Daniel 12:1, the prophet used similar words to describe this time. What did he predict?

- ❖ If God were not to cut short the fulfillment of the Antichrist's purpose, what would happen?

Getting a workout . . . (Word study)

Using the resources you have on hand write a definition for the word *elect* (v. 20).

History has recorded many persecutions against God's people, but the events described by Jesus in these verses pointing to the Great Tribulation will surpass all others!

5. Jesus finishes His teaching on the tribulation period by once again warning of the false prophets. vv. 21–23

- ❖ What kind of power will these individuals possess?

- ❖ If someone professes to be Christ or to see Him, what must you do?

Up close and personal . . .

Are you one of God's *elect*? Being one of God's elect means that God's purpose for *you* was not an afterthought on His part—it was established even before the foundation of the world! Spend a few moments in Romans 8:28–30 and let God encourage you today. Record your thoughts.

Review this week's memory verse.

Day Three: The Second Coming

What to look for . . .

When in the midst of great suffering or persecution, when it seems as if things can't get any worse, what enables you to get through is *hope.* Jesus wanted to give His followers hope by describing His glorious return at the end of the tribulation period.

Read Mark 13:24–27.

Immediately following the tribulation period, things will never be quite the same. *In those days* the entire universe and humanity will be forever changed!

1. What changes will affect the global world as we know it? vv. 24–25

The coming persecutions and natural disasters will bring about much sorrow in the world; but when these things come to pass, Christians everywhere are to know that the return of their Messiah is very near.

2. What will all the people on the earth witness at the same time? v. 26

No one will wonder, for all will know! Jesus will return not as a human being, but as the glorious Son of Man.

3. Upon His return, what will Jesus do? v. 27

- ❖ What do the following passages add to your understanding?
  - Psalm 50:3–5
  - Isaiah 43:6; and 66:18
  - Jeremiah 32:37–39

- Ezekiel 34:13

4. Jesus Christ will return to the earth in the same manner in which he left. What does Acts 1:9–11 say?

Selah . . .

The warnings are clear; there will be natural disasters, persecutions, and false messiahs, but we have the assurance of His return. In the meantime, we must consider His exhortations while we wait. How are *you* actively applying the exhortation to . . .

- ❖ *Be ready?*
- ❖ *Be a witness?*
- ❖ *Be watchful?*

Day Four: No One Knows the Day or the Hour

What to look for . . .

There are differing viewpoints regarding the tribulation period and how Christians factor into that timetable. One viewpoint is that Christ will come "like a thief" (Luke 12:39–40) to remove the church from the earth before the *abomination of desolation* is erected in the Temple and before the final three and a half years of the tribulation (See 1 Corinthians 15:51–52 and 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17.). Jesus' emphasis in the closing verses of this chapter is that *no one knows* the hour of His return—*not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.* His exhortation to believers everywhere is to be on guard and keep a constant vigil because He could arrive at any moment!

Read Mark 13:28–37.

1. What parable does Jesus use to explain the time of His return? vv. 28–30 What will we know when we see *these things* (referring to the events described in verses 5–23) taking place?

- ❖ While the prophecies were certain, the timing of them remains uncertain; and while everything else will pass away, what will remain for all eternity?

2. No one knows or can predict the exactness of Jesus' return, it is left to God. But believers have a role to fulfill in the end times scenario (vv. 33–36).

- ❖ What exhortation does Jesus repeat three times in verses 33, 35, and 37?

- ❖ Why does He emphasize the need for everyone to watch?

The four *times* mentioned in verse 35—the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or at dawn—were the four watches observed by the Romans; meaning that believers were to keep vigil as they waited for His return, but also to watch so that no one could deceive them and rob the house.

Up close and personal . . .

The best and most practical way for you to *keep watch* is to invest yourself in the only two things of this world that are eternal: *God's Word* and *people*! Are these two things a priority in your life? Please share your thoughts.

Review this week's memory verse.

Day Five: Praying God's Purpose

It's time to do some *prayer walking*—not in the literal, but the *spiritual* sense. The Holy Spirit will lead you today as you consider three points from your lesson, write them in the form of a prayer, and lift them to the Lord. If practicing the presence of God is new to you—be patient—it will come, and you will be blessed!

" . . . We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the

Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will."

Romans 8:26-27 NLT

A prayer for diligence as you watch for His return . . .

Do you have a hard time keeping prayer a priority? Do you realize your time of talking to God is important to Him as well as to you? Ask Him to help you keep watch through prayer.

A prayer for being ready when Christ returns . . .

Did you recognize an area in your life this week that you need to adjust in order to be ready for the Lord's return? Acknowledge that area and lift it back to God in prayer.

A prayer for investing in eternity . . .

The time that you take to get to know God through His Word and then turn around and share it with others will result in lasting fruit—both now in this life and when Jesus returns. Ask God to help you be persistent in the two things that matter most to Him.

Write out this week's verse from memory:

Notes

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