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Sermon Notes

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The Clarity, Immediacy, Difficulty, and Eternity of Christ's Words

Mark 13:28-31

What is permanent, and what is temporary?

Wildflowers are temporary... their beauty lasts a few days and they wither.

The morning mist is temporary... as soon as the sun comes up, the heat dissipates the mist

A layer of frost is temporary... again, the warmth of the sun melts it quickly

The movement of the wind is temporary... the gust blows, the leaves flutter and then it is gone... the moment has passed

All these things are temporary...

The real question seems to be WHAT IS PERMANENT?

Is the ground beneath our feet permanent? Is the Atlantic Ocean permanent? Are the Rocky Mountains permanent? Are the sun, moon, and stars permanent?

The striking events of history have stunned us to wonder about permanence! In one stunning morning, on September 11, 2001, the twin towers of the World Trade Center melted before our eyes and disappeared forever from the face of the earth. So also the pandemic of 2020-2021 ended forever certain cherished

habits, exposed the weakness of our supply chain, closed certain businesses, and gave us all a sense of the fragility of our way of life.

Could it be that the most permanent thing in this universe is something invisible... a WORD! Actually many words... Jesus' words:

Mark 13:31 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

What is a "word"? Is it an invisible thing? A sound like the whisper of the wind that floats through the air and then disappears like a faint echo in a cavern? Is a word anything more than a fleeting shadow of reality, something like a nothing...

For many of us, words are the very picture of impermanence... something that lasts only as long as it causes the eardrum to vibrate. But Jesus said His words will last forever, and heaven and earth won't.

The context couldn't be more powerful...

Jesus predicts the destruction of the Temple and of Jerusalem:

Mark 13:2 "Do you see all these great buildings?" replied Jesus. "Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down."

The disciples ask Jesus a three-part question in private while sitting on the Mount of Olives:

Matthew 24:3 "Tell us," they said, "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"

By this time, Jesus has traced out the future in amazing terms

- Mark 13:5-13 describes in general but striking terms how life in this sin-cursed world will progress between the first and second comings of Christ
 - Wars, rumors of wars, famines, earthquakes

- The special and vicious persecution of the church
- The consistent and escalating apostasy of believers under the pressure of that persecution
- The need to stand firm to the end to be saved
- The preaching of the gospel to every nation
- Mark 13:14: the Abomination of Desolation and the terrors that follow
 - The destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70
 - The final trial under the Antichrist at the end of the world
 - The tremendous urgency, the need for Christ's followers living in Jerusalem to RUN FOR THEIR LIVES!!
 - A time of massive tribulation
- Mark 13:24-27 the Second Coming of Christ

Mark 13:24-27 "But in those days, following that distress, "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 men 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.

- The Rapture... the rescue of the elect from the earth

The things the Jews thought were permanent – the temple and the city of Jerusalem – Jesus revealed were actually going to be destroyed...

What a SHOCK! Jesus' disciples were stunned. Now they almost certainly wanted to ask two more questions... 1) When will this happen? 2) If this is impermanent, then WHAT IS PERMANENT? What can I stand on that won't move beneath my feet?

Concerning WHEN WILL THIS HAPPEN?

The answer He gives for the rest of his discourse (both in Mark 13 and Matthew 24-25) is two-fold:

Look for the signs: look for these things to happen, add up the signs

AND: The Lord will come like a thief in the night...suddenly and unexpectedly, SO BE READY AT ANY MOMENT!!

Concerning WHAT IS PERMANENT... WHAT CAN I BUILD MY LIFE UPON?

The unifying theme of today's sermon, however, is not so much the TIMING of Christ's coming but the TRUSTWORTHINESS of Christ's words

We will look at the word of Christ: its clarity... its immediacy... its difficulty... its permanence

In the end, all we have as we look ahead to the second coming of Christ is this: the Words of Christ as recorded in the Scripture

I. Clarity: The Parable of the Fig Tree

Mark 13:28-29 "Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. ²⁹ Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door.

A. The "Parable" of the Fig Tree

1. The "Parables": Difficult Until Christ Makes them Clear

Mark 4:11 He told them, "The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables"

This parable of the fig tree was told to make things clear to His disciples

B. Agricultural Parables: Things Take Time to Develop

1. Jesus' point: you know what happens when the fig tree develops

As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near.

2. When you see some simple things happen in the spring, you know what is coming next... summer is on its way
3. So also when you see all these signs, you know that Christ's coming is IMMINENT
4. There must be a COMBINING of the Word of God (rightly understood) with CURRENT EVENTS... unfolding history

C. "All These Things": The Signs Christ Has Already Given

1. Wars, rumors of wars, famines, earthquakes...
2. This gospel preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations (Mark 13:10)
3. Abomination of Desolation
4. Running for your life; the "Great Tribulation"
5. AND Revelation 8... ecological disasters, sea turned to blood
6. Especially the celestial portents... the sun and moon darkened
7. Those signs point to the imminent return of Christ

D. The Fig Tree: Is It Israel?

1. Some scholars: When the modern state of Israel was established in Palestine in 1948, it began a ticking clock to the end of the world
2. They say this is the budding of the fig tree; represents Israel
3. Dispensational Premillennialists and Christian Zionists
4. It may well be, but it has now been almost 76 years since that happened

5. More certain: the progress of the gospel and the stunning events described at the end

AGAIN: There must be a COMBINING of the Word of God (rightly understood) with CURRENT EVENTS... unfolding history

II. Immediacy: Near... Right at the Door

Mark 13:29 Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door.

A. "Right at the Door": A Sense of Immediacy

1. Jesus' return would be imminent after all these things occurred
2. So also we should have a constant sense of the immediacy of the Second Coming of Christ... so we must be prepared at ALL TIMES

B. An Immediate Encounter with Christ BY FAITH in the WORD

1. This is the power of the word of God; by this we are escorted right into the presence of God
2. The word gives us immediacy with Christ... we can close our eyes as we listen to the word and spiritually SEE the Lord return with the clouds of the air; "it is NEAR, RIGHT AT THE DOOR!"
3. So also in general, we encounter God IMMEDIATELY through the Scripture, whenever we read it by the power of the Holy Spirit

Hebrews 3:7-8 So, as the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you hear his voice, ⁸ do not harden your hearts

Revelation 3:20 Behold! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.

C. Balance Between Prophesied Events and Immediacy

1. Could Christ Come Back Today?
2. If the Antichrist hasn't come yet, can Christ really come back TONIGHT?

3. 2 Thessalonians 2 implies certain things have to happen first
- 4.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-3 Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, ² not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come. ³ Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction.

- a. Reading between the lines, the Thessalonian Christians had their eschatology all wrong... some false teachers had taught them that the Second Coming had already occurred and they had MISSED IT
 - b. Paul clearly teaches the overeager Thessalonians that the end WILL NOT COME until the “man of lawlessness is revealed”
 - c. This is the antichrist, whom we discussed in the sermons on the “abomination of desolation”
 - d. So, the key question is, the day they got Paul’s letter and read that, were the Thessalonians supposed to believe that the Lord could return THAT VERY NIGHT?
 - e. The implication is NO...
5. So also Jesus gives some very specific prophecies in Mark 13... if those things haven’t happened yet, the Lord cannot return
 - a. The gospel preached throughout the world, to every nation
 - b. The abomination of desolation and the sacrilege of the Antichrist, coupled with the great tribulation
 6. YET Matthew 24-25 and in the parable of the Ten Virgins tells us to be ready at every moment, while implying a long delay

Matthew 24:42-44 "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. ⁴³ But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming,

he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁴ So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

Matthew 25:13 "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.

7. There is a mysterious balance here... looking at the SIGNS OF THE TIMES as directed by Matthew 24 and knowing that certain things have to happen first, coupled with CONSTANT VIGILANCE, awaiting the imminent return of Christ
8. The IMMEDIACY of Christ's words enable you to keep that intensity up throughout your life

III. Difficulty: Who Is "This Generation" that Will Not Pass Away?

Mark 13:30 I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.

A. Many of Christ's Words Are DIFFICULT!

Mark 9:32 But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it.

Luke 18:34 The disciples did not understand any of this. Its meaning was hidden from them, and they did not know what he was talking about.

B. A Hotly Debated Saying of Christ

C. A "Solemn Declaration": Truly I say to you...

D. Various Interpretive Options to Reject

1. The word "generation" cannot refer to the human race generally, or to believers generally... we can reject that interpretation out of hand, because it would teach us nothing! Obviously, the human race will not become extinct before the Second Coming, and neither will the church
2. It is impossible for Jesus to mean "Before they die, this present generation that is alive today will experience my Second Coming in the clouds with the angels..."... for then Jesus would have been

MISTAKEN... and that is impossible; furthermore, Jesus already said the gospel of the Kingdom would be preached in the whole world as a testimony to ALL NATIONS... clearly Jesus didn't forget that

E. Various Interpretive Options to Consider

1. He is only speaking of the Fall of Jerusalem in AD 70; in effect He is saying "Some who are alive today will still be alive when the Temple is destroyed"... that aspect of the prediction will be coming true in this lifetime
 - a. In support of that theory, the word "generation" usually means "the people living today" or "the people all living at the same time"
 - b. In that case, Jesus is referring to "all these things" connected with the destruction of Jerusalem
 - c. Many sound interpreters have taken this approach
 - d. BUT some difficulties!
 - i) Jesus has just described the events surrounding the Second Coming... not merely the destruction of Jerusalem
 - ii) Look again at Mark 13:24-26

Mark 13:24-26 "But in those days, following that distress, "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 men will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.

- iii) This statement from Jesus comes AFTER those verses: the heavenly bodies shaken, the Lord returning with glory, the rapture by the angels
2. Option #2: The words "this generation" refers to "this RACE", meaning the Jewish nation as a whole... in effect Jesus is saying that, despite all the persecution of the Jews and the slaughter that will attend BOTH the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans and the later reign of the Antichrist, yet somehow, by the sovereign

hand of God the Jewish race will not become extinct, nor will it melt into the Gentile nations and become indistinguishable from them

F. The Ramifications of the Jews' Preservation

1. This is NO SMALL PROMISE on Jesus' part
2. Throughout the history of the world since Jesus' time, the Jews have been the focus of one persecution or genocide after another
 - a. There were terrible persecutions during the Crusades in Europe; during the First Crusade, in 1096, flourishing communities of Jews on the Rhine and Danube were completely destroyed... this began a regular pattern followed by all the crusades
 - b. During the period of the Black Death in the 14th century, Jews were blamed all across Europe for the bubonic plague and were slaughtered in reprisals
 - c. Muslims also regularly wiped out communities of Jews in various lands... Morocco in the 8th century; North Africa in the 12th century; Tunisia, Libya and other places in the 16th and 17th centuries... Moorish Spain saw a terrible massacre of Jews in Granada in 1066
 - d. In Tsarist Russia in the 19th century, there were terrible pogroms, state-funded uprisings and riots against the Jews
 - e. The 20th century of course saw the worst attack on the Jews in all of history, under both the Nazis and later the Communists... the effort was to utterly exterminate the Jews from the face of the earth
 - f. Therefore, Jesus' prediction that the Jews would 1) not be exterminated, and 2) not be absorbed into the Gentile world is frankly UTTERLY AMAZING
3. Why? Because GOD STILL HAS A PLAN for the Jews, despite their shameful rejection of Christ

IV. Eternity: Christ's Words More Permanent than the Universe

Mark 13:31 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

A. This Temporary Universe

1. Jesus here asserts that "heaven and earth will PASS AWAY"
2. Many verses testify to the temporary nature of this present universe

Hebrews 1:10-12 "In the beginning, O Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. ¹¹ They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. ¹² You will roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed. But you remain the same, and your years will never end."

2 Peter 3:10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.

3. There is nothing you can see with your eyes, hear with your ears, touch with your hands that is ETERNAL... the physical universe will someday PASS AWAY

B. Astonishing Statement: Christ's Words More Permanent than the Universe!

1. Christ is here asserting that His words are eternal... they will last forever
2. In the New Heavens and New Earth, Christ's words will still stand firm, established, be honored
3. We will still be feeding on them, resting on them, relying on them, pondering them, probing their depths, and feeding on them

C. Christ's Assertion: Yet Another Claim to Deity!!

1. Who but God Almighty could make such an assertion:

Mark 13:31 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

2. This is very similar to Christ's earlier statement about the Law and the Prophets:

Matthew 5:17-18 "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸ I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.

3. Christ is EQUATING His own words to all the words of the OT
4. And this assertion has proven to be true so far!! And it reaches BEYOND the end of this world... Christ's word will stand forever

D. What Scripture Says About the Permanence of God's Word

Isaiah 40:8 The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever.

E. The Purpose of this Assertion: Our Faith and Confidence

1. The most intensely wrenching circumstances in human history are described in this chapter
 - a. Horrendous suffering... famines, earthquakes, wars, rumors of wars, attacks on the church, destruction of Jerusalem, a tribulation so great that no one would survive if those days had not been cut short
 - b. The events are so immense and stupendous... even to the shaking of the heavenly beings at the return of Christ
2. Through this and all other trials... one sure and certain foundation: the Word of God
3. Jesus wants us to REST SECURELY ON A FOUNDATION that can never be shaken, and it is HIS WORD

V. Applications

A. Marvel at the Living Word of God

Clarity... Immediacy... Difficulty... Eternity

B. Clarity: Come to Christ to Make the Word Clear

1. Christ is the central message of Scripture
2. Christ is the best interpreter of Scripture
3. Christ holds interpretation in His hand
4. Not everything is equally clear in Scripture... but some things are abundantly clear
5. The GOSPEL is CLEAR!!! Therefore come to Christ for salvation!!!

C. Immediacy: Read the Word of God for an Immediate Encounter with God through Christ

1. God wants to have an IMMEDIATE ENCOUNTER with you TODAY... He wants to be the central part of your day, the central part of everything you do
2. God has given the BIBLE, the written word of God, to minister His presence to you TODAY
3. God has given the HOLY SPIRIT to explain the word to us and minister its truths DIRECTLY to our hearts
4. God means for His church to live by “every word that proceeds from the mouth of God”... to live moment by moment by this or that passage of Scripture directly applied to us by the indwelling Spirit
5. There is IMMEDIACY in the word of God... He is IMMINENT in your hearts by the Word

D. Immediacy: Be Ready Constantly for the Second Coming of Christ...and for your own Death

1. Understand the “Signs of the Times” Concerning the Return of Christ
2. Christ will come when He will come... and our mis-interpretation of these passages will not hinder Him

3. We are clearly told to be ready at ANY TIME for the Second Coming of Christ

Matthew 24:44 So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

4. Jonathan Edwards' resolution:

Resolution #19: "Resolved: Never to do anything which I should be ashamed to do if I expected it would not be above an hour before I should hear the last trumpet."

5. So also we must be ready at ANY TIME for our own death

Resolution #7: "Resolved: Never to do anything which I should be afraid to do if it were the last hour of my life."

IMMINENT: Second Coming of Christ and/or OUR OWN LAST HOUR ON EARTH...

Don't live such as you would be ashamed to do right in front of Jesus... with Him looking on with those eyes of blazing fire.

E. Difficulty

1. There is MILK in God's word, and there is also MEAT
2. Do not expect everything in God's word to be equally clear, equally easy to understand
3. Be ready to WORK HARD on the Word and on doctrine
4. Synthesizing the end times teachings of the Bible is HARD WORK... but it is work not just for professional theologians or pastors... it is beneficial for all Christians to labor hard on the word
5. God ordains difficult things in His word to stretch us and humble us and admit that God's mind soars infinitely high above ours

F. Eternity

1. Meditate deeply on Jesus' amazing statement:

Matthew 24:35 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

2. The image here is of the UNSHAKEABLE nature of Jesus' words... therefore they are a sure and certain FOUNDATION for your life

Matthew 7:24-25 "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.

3. Jesus' words then are a sure and certain basis for your life
 - a. Trust His words with every area of your life
 - b. Trust His words with your financial life

Hebrews 13:5-6 Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." ⁶ So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid.

- c. Trust His words when it comes to your marriage...

Matthew 19:5-6 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? ⁶ So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.'

- d. Trust His words when it comes to your prayer life...

Matthew 21:22 If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.

- e. Trust His words when it comes to fighting lusts and temptations

Matthew 5:29 If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.

- f. Trust His words concerning His Second Coming

g. And especially trust these words from Jesus

John 5:24 "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.

Heaven and earth will pass away... but Jesus' words will NEVER pass away!