

Two trees in my yard are slow. The first year we lived there, I thought, 'are they dead?' In the spring, our white dogwood out back is the last tree in the entire neighborhood to blossom. In the fall, a big oak tree out front is the last to shed its leaves. I barely make it to the town's compost center before it closes for the winter. I have learned seasons from these two trees in my yard.

Since January, we have been looking at large segments of Mark that belong together. There are some things that you can only see when you look at the big picture. For example,

- In the first half, Jesus served people through miracles, deliverances, and preaching repentance. Peter's declaration that Jesus is the Messiah (8:29) is the turning point to the second half.
- In the second half, Jesus is the suffering savior who purchases our salvation with his life.

The messages for the last two Sundays were one day of Jesus' teaching in the Temple.

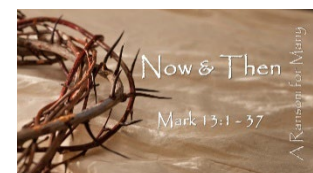
- It was the Tuesday of Holy Week, the last week before his betrayal, trial, and death.
- All the Jewish religious leaders attacked him in three waves trying to trap or discredit him.
- The only person of faith in the Temple was a widow who gave everything she had and trusted God to take care of her.

Jesus' long day is not over. In today's message, he leaves the Temple and goes to the Mount of Olives where a question from his disciples prompts the longest uninterrupted teaching in the entire book.

- Though the question and answer is about the Temple, it is really about the immediate and far future; for the disciples it is about the now & then.
- Jesus tells them about what they can expect as believers.

Now & Then

Mark 13:1-37



1. The Temple, 13:1-4.

'As Jesus was leaving the Temple that day, one of his disciples said, "Teacher, look at these magnificent buildings! Look at the impressive stones in the walls." ²Jesus replied, "Yes, look at these great buildings. But they will be completely demolished. Not one stone will be left on top of another!" ³Later, Jesus sat on the Mount of Olives across the valley from the Temple. Peter, James, John, and Andrew came to him privately and asked him, ⁴"Tell us, when will all this happen? What sign will show us that these things are about to be fulfilled (Mk 13:1-4 NLT)?"'

They can clearly see the impressive Temple, Jesus says 'they will be completely demolished.'

It will save us time if I go through a little history. There are only two Temples and one extensive renovation.

Temples

- 1st - Solomon's 950 to 586 B.C. (Babylonian captivity. In 538 B.C. Cyrus the king of Persia released the exiles)
- 2nd - Zerubbabel's 522 B.C. to 20 B.C. (Greeks conquered, Jews revolted (Hasmonean), and the Romans conquered).
- Herod's 20 B.C. to 70 A.D. (There were extensive modifications to Zerubbabel's. This is the Temple of Jesus' time. It was likely under Herod's finishing touches.)
- Destruction of Jerusalem, 70 A.D. by Caesar Titus after a Jewish revolt. After a fire swept through the Temple, Caesar Titus 'ordered the whole city and Temple to be razed to the ground.'¹

The stones of Herod's Temple were massive: 8' high and 12' long; it was 'one of the most impressive sights in the ancient world.'²

- When Jesus says not one stone upon another, it is quite unimaginable.
- 'Israel viewed the Temple as the linchpin that held heaven and earth together.'³ Its destruction could only mean a total conquest.
- They are shocked and ask, 'when? How will we know?'

Jesus' answer runs the rest of the chapter in two general parts: 1) a prelude to the end – the NOW (vv. 5-23), and 2) the end itself the THEN (vv. 24-36).

2. NOW - Don't Be Deceived, 13:5-8.

¹ William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark NICNT* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1974), p. 452.

² Lane, *Mark NICNT*, p. 450.

³ N.T. Wright & Michael F. Bird, *The New Testament in Its World: An Introduction to the History, Literature, and Theology of the First Christians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2019), p. 570.

'Jesus replied, "Don't let anyone mislead you, ⁶ for many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Messiah.' They will deceive many. ⁷ And you will hear of wars and threats of wars, but don't panic. Yes, these things must take place, but the end won't follow immediately. ⁸ Nation will go to war against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in many parts of the world, as well as famines. But this is only the first of the birth pains, with more to come (Mk 13:5-8 NLT).'"

The takeaway here is simple: do not be deceived, the suffering is just the start.

- Especially troubling is the idea of false prophets, do not put your hope in them.
- Do not be distracted from the mission by any of these events. The real end is not yet.
- 'When all these things begin to happen, stand and look up, for your salvation is near (Lk 21:28 NLT)!'

What are believers to do? – Endure.

3. NOW - Endure, 13:9-13.

""When these things begin to happen, watch out! You will be handed over to the local councils and beaten in the synagogues. You will stand trial before governors and kings because you are my followers. But this will be your opportunity to tell them about me. ¹⁰ For the Good News must first be preached to all nations. ¹¹ But when you are arrested and stand trial, don't worry in advance about what to say. Just say what God tells you at that time, for it is not you who will be speaking, but the Holy Spirit. ¹² A brother will betray his brother to death, a father will betray his own child, and children will rebel against their parents and cause them to be killed. ¹³ And everyone will hate you because you are my followers. But the one who endures to the end will be saved (13:9-13 NLT).""

Remember, this is Jesus' answer to their question about when the destruction of Temple will occur.

This is not what the disciples wanted to hear. They were hoping for a military / political Messiah.

They will ...

- 'Be handed over, v. 9.'
- Experience division in the family, v. 12. Remember the radical commitment to discipleship.
- Be hated, v. 13. But they will be hated because of Jesus.

But ...

- This will be an opportunity, v. 10. They are not to lose sight of the mission of spreading the Good News. The Gospel must be preached.

- They will have the support of the Holy Spirit, v. 11. We can rely on the Holy Spirit in times of trouble, too.
- Endurance will be rewarded, v. 13.

The fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy will be a few years later – within the lifetime of most of Jesus' hearers.

- For Mark's audience this was like reading the daily newspaper.
- The Christians in Rome were despised by Nero; his persecution is a terrible and present reality.
- It would climax with the destruction of Israel in 70 A.D.

Jesus gives them one more thing to do – Flee.

4. NOW - Flee, 13:14-23.

“The day is coming when you will see the sacrilegious object that causes desecration standing where he should not be.” (Reader, pay attention!) “Then those in Judea must flee to the hills. ¹⁵ A person out on the deck of a roof must not go down into the house to pack. ¹⁶ A person out in the field must not return even to get a coat. ¹⁷ How terrible it will be for pregnant women and for nursing mothers in those days. ¹⁸ And pray that your flight will not be in winter. ¹⁹ For there will be greater anguish in those days than at any time since God created the world. And it will never be so great again. ²⁰ In fact, unless the Lord shortens that time of calamity, not a single person will survive. But for the sake of his chosen ones he has shortened those days. ²¹ “Then if anyone tells you, ‘Look, here is the Messiah,’ or ‘There he is,’ don’t believe it. ²² For false messiahs and false prophets will rise up and perform signs and wonders so as to deceive, if possible, even God’s chosen ones. ²³ Watch out! I have warned you about this ahead of time (13:14-23 NLT)!”

Tough times. It is so rough that Mark addresses his readers directly – just like an episode of *The Office* – ‘Reader, pay attention!’ Most Bible scholars believe this happened in 70 A.D.

- We don’t know what the ‘sacrilegious object’ is, but it is worse than when the Greek conqueror Antiochus Epiphanes IV went into the Jewish temple, built an altar to Zeus over the burnt offering altar, and sacrificed a pig on it.
- Ezekiel foresaw this day when ‘the glory of the departed from over the threshold of the temple (Eze 10”18 NLT).’ God’s glory departed because of the sin, neglect, and departure from true worship.

Normally, Jerusalem was a place of refuge, but the people of God were to flee to escape God's judgment. Those who did not flee were 'trapped between starvation and violent destruction.'⁴

- The Jews, influenced by the Zealots, rebelled against Rome. They took back Jerusalem in 66 A.D., but they were defeated a mere 6 years later by Rome, with 70 A.D. being the most important defeat for them.
- I can hear compassion in Jesus' voice when he speaks of pregnant or nursing mothers. Without fleeing it would be catastrophic.
- Daniel prophesied, 'Then there will be a time of anguish greater than any since nations first came into existence (Da 12:1 NLT).'

Mark's audience in Rome was to get ready for severe suffering.

- Mark encouraged them by pointing to who Jesus was - the glorious Son of God, the Messiah: 'For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mk 10:45 NLT).'
- Jesus exchanges his life for our sins, and he rose from the dead. This gives us hope for eternity.
- Who Jesus is and the presence of his Holy Spirit helps the Christians in Rome endure horrible persecution.

Today, we should not let down our guard even though this specific prophecy is fulfilled. You see, we live in between those horrible events to flee from - and our future, the THEN. 'When all these things begin to happen, stand and look up, for your salvation is near (Lk 21:28 NLT)!'

From the near crisis Mark now turns to our future.

5. THEN - Triumph, 13:24-27.

'At that time, after the anguish of those days, the sun will be darkened, the moon will give no light,²⁵ the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.²⁶ Then everyone will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds with great power and glory.²⁷ And he will send out his angels to gather his chosen ones from all over the world—from the farthest ends of the earth and heaven (13:24-27 NLT).'

Unlike the false teachers that mislead, the Son of Man's appearance will be clear; he will come with power and glory.

⁴ Lane, *Mark NICNT*, p. 467.

As Americans we love precise chronology and try to pull out exact details from prophetic writing, but it is intentionally fuzzy. The timing is imprecise.

- 'Won't follow immediately, v. 7.'
- 'Birth pangs, with more to come, v. 8.'
- 'Those days, v. 20.'
- 'At that time, v. 24.'

We are to catch the feeling of the story. For example, one of the reasons we are reading Mark as we are for this sermon series, is that Mark edited his material to make a point. His stories of Jesus are arranged to say something; they have not been in precise chronological order. Jesus' final week in Jerusalem is the most precise section of Mark.

Unlike the fuzziness of the birth pangs, the final triumph is clear and will resolve everything.

- The destruction of the Temple marked the passing of an era. God's glory no longer resides in the Temple, but now resides in his people. 'And we all ... reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory (2Co 3:18 NIV).'
- The return of Jesus will mark the passing of this era. God's glory will be seen in God himself.
- I imagine Temple burned for several days and nights in 70 A.D., but those spectacular flames are nothing compared to falling stars and earthquakes. Nature itself will signal the appearance of God in full power and glory.

I think of Daniel's vision of that moment. 'I saw someone like a son of man coming with the clouds of heaven ... ¹⁴He was given authority, honor, and sovereignty over all the nations of the world, so that people of every race and nation and language would obey him. His rule is eternal—it will never end. His kingdom will never be destroyed (Da 7:13-14 NLT).' Here Jesus adds that the Son of Man will gather his people to himself. No more veiled speech, no more mystery, the scattered people of God will gather around the visible and clear Jesus.

6. The Fig Tree, 13:28-31.

'Now learn a lesson from the fig tree. When its branches bud and its leaves begin to sprout, you know that summer is near. ²⁹In the same way, when you see all these things taking place, you can know that his return is very near, right at the door. ³⁰I tell you the truth, this generation will not pass from the scene before all these things take place.

³¹Heaven and earth will disappear, but my words will never disappear (13:28-31 NLT).'

Just like my two trees, just like the fig tree, let's learn to read the signs of the times. Again, it is extremely fuzzy, but just like that generation witnessed the destruction of the Temple, perhaps we will be the generation that sees the glorious coming of Jesus in his power.

So, what should we do as people who live in between?

7. NOW, 13:32-37!

“However, no one knows the day or hour when these things will happen, not even the angels in heaven or the Son himself. Only the Father knows. ³³ And since you don't know when that time will come, be on guard! Stay alert! ³⁴ “The coming of the Son of Man can be illustrated by the story of a man going on a long trip. When he left home, he gave each of his slaves instructions about the work they were to do, and he told the gatekeeper to watch for his return. ³⁵ You, too, must keep watch! For you don't know when the master of the household will return—in the evening, at midnight, before dawn, or at daybreak. ³⁶ Don't let him find you sleeping when he arrives without warning. ³⁷ I say to you what I say to everyone: Watch for him (13:32-37 NLT)!”

Three main points taken from this passage serve as our conclusion today.

1. No one knows. Even though we are to read the signs, no one knows. We can sense the nearness of Jesus' coming, we just do not know for sure.
 - Let's be cautious of end-time teachers. If Jesus did not know, do not assume someone asking for money does.
 - Let's not get distracted from the mission by trying to match up the Bible with today's news – all we are given is the general feeling.
 - Why is it fuzzy? Because if we knew when Jesus was to return, we would live like the devil until the moment before.
2. God wants us to watch. We are to be on guard, stay alert, and watch for him.
3. God wants us to work until he returns. Let's not be lazy or sleeping when he comes. We are to faithfully advance the kingdom of God by calling people to repentance and share the Good News.
4. Be ready for Suffering. Jesus said, 'In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world (Jn 16:33 NIV).' We are to take up our cross and follow Jesus (Mk 8:34 NLT).

'When all these things begin to happen, stand and look up, for your salvation is near (Lk 21:28 NLT)!'

Conclusion.

Even though it is delayed, I know that my dogwood is going to bloom, and the oak will drop its leaves when the time is right. In the same way, I am certain that our Lord Jesus will return.

Salvation plea.

Sheep & goats: 'When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left (Mt 25:31-33 NIV).'

Prayer.