

In Those Days.

Mark 13:24-37

2 Peter 1

Luke 24:1-27

Responsive Reading. Psalm 111

For the past 3 weeks now we have been working our way through chapter 13 of the book of Mark, which has been Mark's recording of the discourse between Jesus and some of his disciples while on the Mount of Olives overlooking the Temple in Jerusalem. I think that this has been an interesting and kinda of fun study as we work our way through this controversial passage in an attempt to understand and see what it is exactly is being said here, hopefully without the bias or preconceived understanding of an already established eschatological system. But rather I have been trying to come at this to see what the text itself says, putting ourselves in the shoes of these disciples and discovering what this all meant to them, and what it also means to us today.

As we have been going through this, it is rather apparent that some of the ideas of the "end of days" that we are all familiar with do not seem to hold up without first coming to this passage with some sort of inferred understanding. So far, we have seen a clear prophesy of the destruction of the temple itself in Jerusalem. We have also seen a warning of trials, tribulations, and persecutions to come which as we discussed last week hints at a multiple layer prophesy tying itself to the destruction of the Temple in AD 70, but Titus, but it yet hints at another further time in verse 19 when it says that there will be tribulation unlike any that has come before, and tribulation like never will be again. Giving us a clue that this is applicable to the end of time. There was both tribulations during Titus destruction of the Temple, and there will be yet more, greater coming tribulation.

In this chapter Jesus lists a series of signs that will point to the question the disciples ask, of when is it that the temple shall be destroyed. And as we read through this again this morning, notice that these things that Jesus lists predicting the destruction of the Temple are the same things that we see happening today. So in this discourse there is definitely a near future prediction, and a further future prediction which we also get a hint at with the mention of the coming of False Christs. Early in the chapter while describing the destruction of the Temple he warns of many false teachers, and those claiming to be the messiah, then there is a shift of focus which we are clued into by the mention of the abomination of desolation in verse 14 and another section of tribulations, and yet another warning of false Christs. But this 2nd account, of this great tribulation, and false Christ's is greater than the first, for these false Christs will not only be making a claim like those mentioned in verse 5-6 but will also be performing signs and wonders as a proof of their claims, and it says that they will be so convincing that if it was even possible, even the elect would be deceived.

Think about that warning for a minute, the arrival of someone claiming to be Christ, performing signs and miracles will have an effect of splitting the difference between the elect, and those who are but mere pretenders. In other words, it will separate those who are truly the faithful, with those who outwardly may seem a child of God, but inwardly have no working of the holy spirit, no spirit of discernment witnessing to them, warning them of this false Messiah, but rather will be deceived, proving their faith is false, and their eyes are blind, and their ears were deaf to the message of the bible. It is a rather sobering thought to think upon. As cheesy as it was, and this is probably a bad example but I think of the Left Behind movie, specifically the scene where the members of the church are no longer there...yet the pastor remains. While I do not hold to the dispensation pre-tribulation rapture view as you guys know I think that this scene does make a valid point showing in a dramatized way that not all who say Lord Lord, are his.

Taking from our reading this morning, there is no real mention of a pre-tribulation rapture, and unless you add it in yourself, applying your own inference and understanding you will not see it here. We see, the destruction of the temple in AD 70, with out a doubt, and then a great tribulation such as the world has never known, and it isn't until after that, in verse 26 that we will get to today that we see the Son of Man coming in power and glory. But what I want to take from this imagery from the Left Behind series, is not that the congregation was raptured leaving the pastor behind, but rather using the same imagery as an example of those who would be deceived by the false Christs and false prophets. Leaving the congregation, leaving the church to follow these deceivers. A building full of people claiming the blood of Christ, claiming faith and belief upon him....and proving in the end that some of them were not the elected children of God, but being deceived believing that the false Christ is the true second coming. That is why I wanted to Read 2nd Peter this morning, for we must all be even more diligent to make our call and election sure and not be lead away by various and strange beliefs, or false teachers, false prophets, and false christs. As we already know, those who are in Christ, those who are the elected children of God will by no means be lost, for God promises that he will not lose a single one of his children. God's elect will not follow these false prophets and christs, they will not be deceived, for they have the holy spirit indwelling in them witnessing, and guarding them against such deception. But as a testament to the deceptiveness of these false messiah's Jesus says, in verse 22 here, if it was even possible, even the elect would be deceived.

When we read things such as these, it affords us a good opportunity to make our calling and election sure. If we doubt, if we are concerned that maybe our faith is not true, our faith is rather a product of our own will instead of the product of God's election and calling then we should re-examine our claims, meditate upon these things, read our bibles, and come to God in prayer to either find comfort in his promises toward us, or maybe even finding the faith that we thought we had, was rather one of our own making, not one which comes from a repentant, regenerated heart but rather one that is relying on our own will, or our own works to make it so. It is better to wrestle with the possibility of false faith now, then to be confronted by such tribulation, or false prophets and discovering at the judgment that all you thought you did in the name of Christ was nothing but empty works, and a false faith. And that doesn't have to wait until the end of days, we all have a limited time on this earth, death could come to any one of us even this afternoon and we will be facing that judgment. IT is better to make your calling and election sure, today, then to stand before God claiming all the things you have done in his name and he tells you, depart from me you who work iniquity.

So, my intention of having a little recap of the past 2 weeks bringing us up to this week seemed to have taken off on it's own a bit, but that is ok because it is exactly what this passage is here to do, to warn, to bring these things to our hearts and minds. So let us keep all these things in mind while we read our passage this morning. Since we will be closing out this chapter this morning and it is really all one big discourse spanning from the destruction of the temple in AD 70, and further talking about the 2nd coming of Christ I want to read the entire chapter this morning. (Read Chapter 13)

Over the past 2 weeks we have seen this progression in Jesus' discourse here, he implores his disciples, to hear, to watch, and to see. We have seen the same sort of unfolding of prophesy progression as we read this entire chapter, verses 1-13 easily is attributed to the destruction of the temple in AD 70, then in 14, we see the arrival of the abomination of desolation, which is a reference hearkening back to the book of Daniel that we looked at last week which at that time was prophesying the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem in 169 BC. But with Jesus mentioning it here, it isn't in the context of the past, but rather of what is coming.

Then in what we are looking at this morning, the last section starting in verse 24 we see the end of these things. This final section here makes mention of some pretty catastrophic events, after a tribulation like the world has never seen, will come the end, the sun will darken, and the moon will no longer give light the stars of heaven will fall and the powers of heaven will be shaken. It is obvious that this is not a reference to AD 70 and the destruction of the Temple by Titus, or any other event that has happened in history, but something bigger, something greater. Notice that it is these upheavals, these cosmic, catastrophic events are what ushers in the the Son of Man, it is not the false prophets, and false messiahs, but these events will be witnessed by the whole world. Adolf Schlatter wrote that in this description that Jesus provides his disciples of the Parousia, or 2nd coming, consists almost entirely of quotes from scripture itself. In this account Jesus did not invent his own imagery for the event in which in the glory of God he would reveal himself. He grounded the hope of the disciples solely on the prophetic words, in the same way that he strengthened himself for the cross with the assurance that suffering and divine will were united in Scripture. Which is further indication that Jesus himself is the fulfillment of Israel's history and the definitive testimony to his mission is recorded in Israel's scriptures. As we see in the account Clay read this morning in Luke 24, verse 27, “ And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.”

In Mark's day, and even some today believe that the stars are thought to be celestial heavenly powers that have influence over our lives. At the end of time all such powers, whether real or imagined will be destroyed. The picture that we get here in verses 24 and 25 is total cosmic collapse. Darkness, and chaos will consume everything. Later we will see a small glimpse of something of the sort at the death of Jesus, Mark records that darkness covered the whole world..it was as if Satan had won, the Son of God has been killed, his mission and witness has been silenced. But it was not a victory for Satan, but rather the coronation of Israel's Eternal King who will one day return to gather his people. Just like in this scene of Jesus death, we see darkness and chaos, but out of it through the death and resurrection came the fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham, bringing hope and light to the world offering reconciliation of God's children to himself, we see the culmination of the end of days in much of the same light. Through destruction, darkness, and chaos, we will rise triumphant with our savior as it says in verse 26 and 27, “Then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory, and then he will send his angels, and gather together his elect from the four winds, from the farthest part of the earth to the farthest part of heaven. “

This prophesy should not instill in God's people dread and fear as it seems to in many today, but rather it is a message of hope and a message of deliverance. Even the destruction of the world itself can not overshadow, or thwart the return of Christ, and when he returns, he comes again to gather his elect. Turn with me to 1Thessalonians chapter 4 for it talks of this very thing, the gathering of his people. Starting in verse 13. “But I do not want you to be ignorant, Brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, those who have died, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. IT is the same with the 2nd coming, if we are to be witnesses of these catastrophic events and the destruction of the world, do not sorry, or fret, but have hope. Verse 14, and why can we have hope? “For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with him those who are dead in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are dead. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord”

This discourse by Jesus is quite the opposite of what the disciples will be soon witnessing isn't it. For in the upcoming weeks we will be going through the account of Jesus suffering and death, which is a far cry from the imagery we get of him coming in a cloud, in power and glory. He who is soon to be beaten, mocked, and crucified as a common criminal will come with great power and glory. If we were to go back to the old testament and look through various passage when it talks about the presence or power of God, it is often referenced with clouds and here we see this reference of Jesus return in the clouds, with the presence and power of God. This is just another message the symbolizes that the temple itself is no longer necessary, for the presence of God is no longer in the holy of holy of the temple, but it is with Jesus himself. When Jesus returns in the clouds, with the presence and power of God it shows that God is no longer in the temple but in Jesus, the Son of Man.

Before people would gather to the temple to worship, and offer their sacrifices but look at verse 27, when he comes in the clouds, he will send forth and gather his people to himself. The temple is no longer the meeting place between God and man, but it is only found in Jesus Christ. He is the one and only mediator and is the fulfillment of the temple and all of its practices and traditions. Also, unlike the temple which was set up by God for the Jews, we see here that when Jesus gathers his flock, it is from all peoples, from every corner of the world. God's elect are widespread and diverse across his creation, coming from all races, creeds, and social status' but they are all focused on the same focal point, which is Christ himself. It is around him that we gather, and it is only through him that we can find redemption and peace from God's wrath upon the sinful world.

So many people want to take these apocalyptic passages and trying to figure out and devise when the return of Christ will be, and I think in doing so they are really missing the entire point of these passages. It is not about when Christ will come, it is about his triumphant, conquering return. As I had mentioned earlier this morning there are quite a few things that are missing in Jesus' description of the coming of the end of the age. There is no mention of the millennium, there is no mention of a new Jerusalem or even a rebuilt temple, there is mention of the restoration of the nation of Israel to its former glories, there is no battle of Armageddon, All of these things are things are not mentioned and set aside in favor of the truth of the power and glory of Jesus' future coming and the promise that his elect will be gathered to him.

In this last section, verses 28 through the end of the chapter it would seem that Jesus switches back and forth between the destruction of the temple and the end of the age. at verse 28 switches focus back again from the end of the age back to the destruction of the temple. We can see that this is the focus of these verses here for in verse 30, he says that this generation will not pass away until these things take place. Also in verse 29, we see the phrase when you see these things happen, remember he is talking to his disciples about the destruction of the temple building, verse 2. Do you see these buildings, not one stone shall be left upon another, that shall not be thrown down and they ask him, when will these things be. So in the context of this passage, here these verses are tying back into the original question of when these things shall be. And just as he had done in chapter 11 uses the Fig tree again as a analogy of the destruction of the temple, but this time not in the same way as he did in chapter 11 but rather says just as you can use the fig tree to know when summer is near you will also see these things happening that I have told you and it is then that the destruction of the temple is near.

Now at verse 31 it seems to shift back for he says that Heaven and earth will pass away, but my Words will by no means pass away. This is a bold claim by Jesus, pointing to his eternal authority and existence. These events here that deal with the destruction of the temple, and with the 2nd coming of Christ are blended together in a mysterious way which are all events in our way of thinking and understanding are all separate events that have and or will happen.

But we must remember that in God's sovereignty he laid out this plan, and each and everything is going exactly as he has determined. In God's saving plan, the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension and the 2nd coming are really all facets of one event. The salvation of his elect. So where does that leave us today in this timeline of events. Christ has come, salvation has been purchased, so it would seem that ever since the arrival of Jesus and the culmination of the salvific work on the cross I think it is safe to say that mankind has been living in the last days. In verse 32, we get another shift, Jesus had told them the signs of the coming destruction of the temple, he had told them that their generation would not pass before these things happen, but in verse 32 he weaves back into the end of the age saying but of that day and hour no one knows, nor the son, but only the Father. Take heed, watch and pray for you do not know when the time is. And then he proceeds to give examples of how the 2nd coming will be unknowable, mysterious, sudden, and unexpected.

I know that there has been a lot of paper used in the writing of trying to discern the meaning of these last verses, in an attempt to understand the signs but I think the very point is that we can not know, in the same way that our own death is unknowable. When I read this what stands out to me, is while there will be a Great day of the Lord when he comes in power to gather his elect, there is also the death of the saints that has been happening for generations upon generations since the beginning of this world. For those who die, it is their end of the age in a sense. If I was to die today, that means that today would be, my last day. The ultimate truth to this whole thing is that none of us will escape this last day, whether it be by our own death, or in the 2nd coming of Christ in power to gather his elect. And each end is just as mysterious, so what are we to do? Well, We are to watch, and remain faithful for we do not know when it is our time to be called into the presence of the Lord. I want to close out our study today, and closing out this chapter by quoting Edwards in his commentary about Jesus' instruction to watch.

Temptations come in many forms, False prophets raise false hopes, mistaken signs raise fears and anxiety, the delay of the 2nd coming of Christ can induce complacency and neglect, and the lack of knowledge induces resignation and defeat. These and other factors tempt disciples to forsake their vocation which is grounded in the fact twice repeated. You do not know when that time will come but the same vocation is grounded in the imperative to be on guard, and to be alert. The day and hour will come suddenly, when those who are confident of their own calculations are sleeping. 5 times Jesus warns his disciples to watch and be alert in this mini parable in verse 34. This parable focuses on the door keeper who has but one charge, as the door keeper he is to watch for the masters return. It is a call to live faithfully in the present, being attentive to signs and being ready at any hour for the return of the master. WE do not know when our time has come, we do not know when the master will return for us, but we are not to worry, be anxious, nor be complacent, we are to be faithful in each day that we are given awaiting his return.