

Sermon outline and notes:

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Mark 13:1-10 “Early Signs of the End”

Intro. There seems to have always been on the part of mankind a keen interest in the future. Somehow men know that life will not always continue as we know it. Opinion polls have shown that most people believe in an end of the world in some sense of the word. People really get interested if they think that the end of the world could take place in their lifetime. Actually, the Bible does not talk so much about the end of the world, but the end of the age. When Jesus comes again, the world will not end, but this present sin-cursed evil age will come to an end. Satan will be bound & Jesus will reign. What a day that will be!

People try to satisfy their curiosity about the future in various ways. Some people turn to the psychics. Others turn to their horrible [horo]scopes. So in the midst of all these satanic imitations, we must consider the question, “Is it possible for the people of God to know what the future holds?” Well the God that we believe in and serve is the God who “declares the end from the beginning.” Though He has not committed Himself to declaring *everything* about the future, He has declared much of what will happen in the future. In Mark chapter 13, the Lord Jesus tells us much of what will happen from His day until the time He will return to earth. Some of what He says here has already been fulfilled. The rest has yet to be fulfilled.

In I Thess. 5:4 Paul points out that believers are not in darkness like unbelievers, and he says that the Day of the Lord will not overtake us as a thief in the night. We should not be surprised by end-time events. So Paul says in v.6 of that chapter that we should watch. Several times in this Olivet Discourse, Jesus called upon His disciples to watch (vv.5, 9, 23, 33, 37). But how do we watch? Look over at vv.28-29, “Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender, and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see these things happening, know that it is near—at the doors!” The main way that we watch for the Second Coming of Christ is to watch for the *signs* of the Second Coming of Christ.

Do you know what signs point to the Second Coming of Jesus? I want you to know what signs or events are clearly saying, “Jesus is coming, Jesus is coming.” Jesus Himself tells us, as recorded in Mark 13, what events will lead up to His return to this world. I hope you will be able to look for these signs as they occur, understand what they can mean, and react properly.

It is significant that this teaching about the return of Christ took place right before the death of Christ. To understand who He really is, the disciples were called upon to look beyond Jesus’ death to His glorious return. The Son of Man had to suffer and die, but after that He would be vindicated and glorified.

Now let’s start off by considering:

I. PAST PROPHECIES FULFILLED

Why should we take a look at ancient history? History has proven that Jesus was indeed correct concerning the prophecies that were fulfilled in the first century. Since Jesus was 100% accurate in those predictions, then we can have confidence that the other prophecies will indeed be fulfilled. Note with me the first prophecy that was fulfilled:

A. Jesus Predicted the Destruction of Israel as a Nation – Now there is a context to this chapter that you need to understand. The Lord has been in the temple, and has been dealing with those who were rejecting Him. As Jesus walked away from the temple that day, He stunned the disciples when He said to the people, “Your house is left to you desolate” (Mt. 23:38). Jesus was predicting the fall of Jerusalem, and then the destroyed city would no longer be inhabited.

That is exactly what happened. When the Jews rebelled against the Romans almost 40 years later (beginning in 66 A.D.), Jerusalem was taken by Titus, son of the emperor Vespasian (AD 69-79). It is believed that more than a million Jews perished. The rest were sold into slavery & scattered to the nations. As a political unit, Israel ceased to exist. Many believed that God would send the Messiah & deliver them from the Roman army, but they had already rejected their Messiah!

Just because Jerusalem was conquered by the Romans does not mean that the temple would be destroyed. Often sacred temples would be spared out of fear of offending the gods represented. Yet notice another prediction that Jesus made:

B. He Also Predicted the Destruction of the Temple - Notice the background of this prediction. In v.1 we read, “Then as He went out of the temple, one of His disciples said to Him, ‘Teacher, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here!’” The Jews knew nothing more solid and seemingly permanent than the temple. Also, there has not been in ancient times a sacred building equal to the temple. It was considered to be among the most spectacular wonders of the ancient Roman Empire. The disciples were impressed and shared their thoughts with Jesus. As they left, the disciples pointed out to the Lord the stones of the temple. They probably pointed to some of the huge stones that were used for the foundation and other lower parts of the temple. According to Josephus, some of the stones were thirty-seven feet long by twelve feet high by eighteen feet deep!¹ Some of these stones weighed a hundred tons! Imagine how they moved those stones in place in a day before heavy machinery!

In response, Jesus shakes them by what He says in v.2, “Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone shall be left upon another, that shall not be thrown down.” Imagine how shocked they were when Jesus informed them that the building they admired so much would one day be demolished. They must have thought, “Surely that would not include the destruction of the temple!” The only stones that were left were the stones of the foundation, & some of the stones of the retaining wall. The stones of the buildings were all torn down just as Jesus predicted.

My friend we could ask that question today. Don’t you see all these beautiful buildings? What do we really see? We see their beauty, strength, stability, and permanence. It looks to me as if they are here for a long time. Yet who would have ever thought that the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York would have come crashing down with such total destruction? The fact is such buildings are only temporary. They are passing away. Paul stated the spiritual truth this way: “the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Cor. 4:18). Are you living for things that are eternal, or only temporal?

Well, about 40 years later the temple was destroyed just as Jesus had predicted. The Jewish historian Josephus described what happened: “Now the fateful day had arrived, the tenth of the month Lous, the very day on which previously it had been burned by the King of Babylon.... One of the soldiers, neither awaiting orders nor filled with horror of so dread an undertaking, snatched a brand from the blazing timber and, hoisted up by one of his fellow soldiers, flung the fiery missile through a golden window. While the sanctuary was burning... children and old people, laity and priests alike were massacred. The emperor ordered the entire city and sanctuary to be razed to the

¹ Josephus, *Antiquities* 15.11.3.

ground.” Only after the fire had gutted it were the remaining walls pulled down, as Jesus predicted in v.2. The Romans dismantled every stone in the building to get to the gold that melted into the cracks during the fire.

Notice what Jesus says in v.31, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.” Jesus said that His Word would stand when all else in this world has passed away. He has already demonstrated that His Word is true. Not only did Jesus give this prophecy some 40 years before it happened, but this prophecy was recorded & distributed by Mark several years prior to the fulfillment of these words! So we should give heed regarding the prophecies that have yet to be fulfilled. You can trust your life & soul to the words of Jesus.

Next, let’s consider:

II. PRESENT PROPHECIES THAT ARE BEING FULFILLED

Most of Mark 13 related to prophecies that have yet to be fulfilled, since they describe events that will take place within a few years before the return of Christ and the end of this present age. So the question of the disciples in v.4 still applies, “Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign when all these things will be fulfilled?” In the light of the immediately preceding context here in Mark, the words, “When will these things be...?” would seem to refer only to the destruction of Jerusalem and temple. Nevertheless, a second look at the phraseology—note particularly “all these things”—points to a broader, more comprehensive, meaning. The very form in which the question is cast seems to indicate that, in their minds, Jerusalem’s fall, particularly the destruction of the temple, would mean the end of the age. In this opinion they were partly mistaken, as Jesus would show. So it would seem best to regard the question as reported by Mark to be an abbreviation of that which Matthew 24:3 states more fully, namely, “Tell us, when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?”

Jesus would not and could not reveal the exact time of fulfillment, as He indicates in v.32, “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” But the disciples were correct in assuming that there would be signs that would show the people of God that the return of Christ would be near.

Jesus predicted that the following signs would take place *prior* to the very last days. Many of these signs took place before the fall of Jerusalem. First, He warns of:

A. Spiritual Deception – In v.6 Jesus warns, “For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am He,’ and will deceive many.” The pages of history are filled with the tragic stories of false Messiahs and their enthusiastic but deluded disciples. Jesus warned His disciples not to be deceived by these impostors. About A.D. 132 Simon bar Kosiba evidently claimed to be the Messiah and led another Jewish revolt against Rome. The Jews rejected their true Messiah and many imposters rose to take His place. Back in the 1970’s someone estimated that 1,100 false Messiahs had arisen in the previous 50 years who claimed to be a Messiah or Savior to the world. Most had risen in Africa, India, or the Orient.² Furthermore, there is the false Jesus of the cults, but he is not the Jesus of the Bible. There is the false Jesus of the liberal theologians, but he is not the Jesus of the Bible.

As the end of time approaches, there will be more and more people who will step forward claiming to be the savior of the world. Difficult days are fertile ground for the rise of false Messiahs that offer hope. Beware that you are not deceived by their slick words and evil deception.

So watch out for spiritual deception. In fact, Jesus says in v.5, “Take heed that no one deceives you.” And don’t be deceived even by signs and wonders, as Jesus warns in v.22. They are

² Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: #1512* (Rockville, Maryland: Assurance Publishers, 1979).

no sure sign that a teacher is from God. You should look at the character of the teacher and the content of his message. We should compare what we see, hear, and experience by what Jesus has said in the Word of God. If what we see, hear, or experience is not fully consistent with the Word of God, then we should reject it. This is why you and I need to be grounded in the Word of God. We need to be familiar with what the Bible says and what we believe.

Another sign that we are approaching the end times is:

B. International Disruption – In v.7 Jesus says, “But when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be troubled; for such things must happen....” Then He says in v.8, “For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom....” What is significant about this prediction is the fact that at the time He spoke those words, the Roman peace through military strength was widespread. But Christ said war would come; and it did. “Rumors of war” soon followed these words of Jesus. Emperors Caligula, Claudius, & Nero threatened war against Israel before it finally came beginning with the Jewish rebellion in 66 A.D. Jerusalem fell in 70 A.D. The fortress of Masada fell in 73 or 74 A.D. There were other wars in the outlying regions of the Empire.

Wars have continued to this very day. Oh, the politicians promise peace, but they can’t deliver lasting peace. It has been supposed that modern social theory & political systems would bring peace. For example, at the beginning of the 20th century, there was talk of bringing about world peace. And even though world war broke out by 1915, WWI was supposed to be the war to end all wars. But it didn’t! War continued and intensified with WWII. At the close of the war, the United Nations was founded with the hope & promise of ending war between nations. Yet wars have continued in just about every continent of the globe. In fact, there have been over 300 wars fought since 1945! There are wars & rumors of wars even as I speak.

Today, there is more talk of peace. But don’t be deceived by such talk. While seeking peace can be a noble act, lasting peace will not come until the Prince of Peace comes, Jesus Christ. Instead, I Thess. 5:3 says, “for when they shall say, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction comes upon them....”

I believe that war may intensify a few years before the coming Tribulation, and I do believe that the bitterness of war will lead the world to look for a solution, which will open the door to the antichrist to offer a solution.

Friend, until Jesus comes there will be no lasting peace in this world, but you can have lasting peace in your soul! Receive Jesus into your heart. As someone has said, “No Jesus. No peace. Know Jesus. Know peace.”

Jesus also predicted:

C. Earthquakes – In the middle of v.8 Jesus said, “And there will be earthquakes in various places....” There have always been earthquakes from the time of recorded history. Vincent notes that between this prophecy by Jesus in about A.D. 30 and the destruction of Jerusalem, there were 4 major earthquakes (in Crete, A.D. 46 or 47, at Rome, A.D. 51, at Apamaia in Phrygia, A.D. 60, & at Campania, A.D. 63). However, to be prophetically significant, we may expect that they will increase in frequency & intensity as we approach the return of Christ. In fact, during the 19th century there were 9 major quakes. In the 20th century there were over 45! [From 1947 to 1956 there were 7 major quakes. From 1957 to 1966 there were 17! And just from 1975 to 1976 there were 18!³] More recently, you may remember the awesome earthquake in San Francisco that took place in 1994 (1/17). On January, 1, 1995, Japan was rocked by an awesome earthquake. The Japan quake toll exceeded 6,000 dead, 21,000 injured, and 200,000 left homeless. We saw with

³ Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: #1237* (Rockville, Maryland: Assurance Publishers, 1979).

our own eyes what an earthquake can do when a powerful quake occurred under the Pacific Ocean in December of 2003. That earthquake spawned a tsunami that killed 300,000 people! There was another major earthquake in Pakistan in 2005, followed by the Sichuan earthquake in China in 2008. Then, the past 6 months or so we have had several more major earthquakes, including the Haiti & Chili earthquakes. In Haiti some 230,000 people died, and 1,000,000 were made homeless!⁴ A 2010 U.N.-sponsored report noted that more people died from earthquakes in the past decade than from any other disaster. Experts say earthquakes will continue to threaten millions of peoples' lives because eight out of the 10 most-populous cities in the world are on earthquake fault-lines.⁵

Then in the last of v.8 Jesus explains something about the nature of this & other signs. He says, "These are the beginnings of sorrows." The word translated "sorrows" (*odin*) means "birth pangs," suggesting that the world at that time will be like a woman going through the pains of childbirth. This same image is found in other Scriptures as well (see Isa. 13:6-8, Jer. 4:31; 6:24, 13:21; 22:20-23; 1 Thess. 5:3). These signs have always been with us, but since these events are compared to "birth pangs," the indicated disturbances will probably be more frequent and intense as we get closer and closer to the end of the age. In fact, in the book of Revelation we read of 4 earthquakes that take place during the Tribulation. Right before Jesus comes again, we read in Revelation 16:18, "and there was a great earthquake, such a mighty and great earthquake as had not occurred since men were on the earth."

So every time I hear of a major earthquake, it's as if God is reminding us that Jesus is coming!

D. Famines – In the last of v.8 Jesus also predicted there would "be famines" Indeed, there were four famines between 41-54 A.D. during the reign of Claudius in Judea & much of the Roman Empire. Once again, there has always been famine. But because of this prophecy, we can expect that famine will continue all the way until the end, in spite of modern farming methods. In fact, famine will likely intensify just prior to the return of Christ. That means that the factors that cause famine are in essence signs of the end times. Note with me the following causes of famine that we can expect:

1. War - Famine often follows war (cf. Rev. 6:4, 6). After WWI, 27,000,000 died of hunger.

2. Environmental Disaster & Abuse - Famine is also caused by man's abuse of the environment. The Gulf Oil disaster is hindering the harvesting of seafood from the gulf.

3. Population Explosion - In the days prior to the flood, there was a great population explosion. Jesus said, "As it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be in the coming of the Son of Man." Though the population explosion is by no means the cause of famine, in some highly populated areas, it contributes to the problem.

4. Bad Weather – This would include drought (1 Kings 17:1), excessive rains & flooding, hurricanes, etc.

5. Insects & rodents contribute to the problem. In India, because of their religion, rats outnumber people 5 to 1. The rats eat up much of the available food.

6. Plant diseases diminish the harvest of food.

Again, I believe we can expect each of these problems to intensify prior to the return of Christ.

⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2010_Haiti_earthquake.

⁵ http://www.redorbit.com/news/science/1815603/earthquakes_biggest_killer_over_last_10_years/index.html.

E. Insurrections - In the last of v.8 Jesus also predicted there would “be troubles.”⁶ The word translated “troubles” (*tarache*) refers to a disturbance, commotion; a sedition. We see this in Greece today. As the Europe plunges into more economic trouble, we will probably see even more disturbances among the people.

F. Fatal Diseases - In addition to earthquakes and famines, Luke 21:11 mentions pestilences. About 5 years before the fall of Jerusalem, 30,000 people died of disease in a single autumn in Rome. Years later, plagues were epidemic in Europe during the middle ages. The Black Death of 1347-1348 claimed a quarter of Europe’s population. More recently, an influenza outbreak during World War I led to the deaths of 25 million people. Three times more people died of the flu during World War I than actually died in battle!

As we have experienced great advances in medical science, many unbelievers perhaps would laugh at the idea that pestilence & disease would be a sign of the end times. A few decades ago many would have thought that science would eradicate disease by the year 2,000. Certainly, great advances have been made, especially in some types of diseases like polio. However, I am sure that Jesus will be proven right. Science cannot save us. It seems that just when we get the upper hand of one disease, a new disease crops up with even greater fierceness, such as AIDS. There is still no cure for AIDS. A flesh-eating virus has now appeared in Africa that eats an inch of flesh per hour. In just fifteen hours from the point of discovery, this virus will kill a human being if its progress is not arrested. So though we should continue to fight disease, we realize that the only ultimate hope of victory over disease & death is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is coming again to end the curse of sin!

Jesus Himself gives one primary application regarding the appearance of these early signs. He says in v.7, “do not be troubled....” Don’t get worried and agitated every time you hear of one of these signs. Though they point to the end & remind us that Jesus is coming, they do not mean that the end is upon us. For He says in the last of v.7, “for such things must happen, but the end is not yet.” Jesus warns that we are not to conclude that these signs, in and of themselves, are indications that the end of the age has come upon us. The events here indicated have significance. They are stepping stones leading to the final goal. By means of them the end of the age is both foreshadowed and brought closer, and God’s eternal plan is being carried forward. Surely Jesus spoke these words to dampen uncontrolled enthusiasm and speculation about the future. We are not to set dates predicting the return of Christ (v.32).

Finally, I want to conclude this message about the signs of the times by considering:

III. ONE PENDING PROPHECY YET TO BE FULFILLED

Jesus said in v.10, “And the gospel must first be preached to all the nations.” Matthew’s account adds to v.10, “then the end will come” (24:14). One of the most important signs pointing to the return of Christ is the Gospel reaching all the nations. Jesus implies that the task of evangelism will be taking place until the end of the tribulation. This is confirmed by the Great Commission, for Jesus promised to be with His people to the end of the age.

So here we have a brief statement of our mission. Israel had clearly rejected Jesus. In just a few days they would have Him arrested & condemned to death. So Jesus turns to the nations. Clearly, Jesus wants to reach the nations with His saving Gospel.

We have seen that Jesus predicted the fall of Jerusalem. By the time that prophecy was fulfilled, the gospel had already reached much of the known world (see Col 1:6, 23). Today, the

⁶ NU omits “and troubles.” But see Luke 21:9, *akatastasia*, “instability, a state of disorder, disturbance, confusion.”

world mission of the Church is in fact being implemented, and in many areas is gaining ground. In Africa south of the Sahara the expansion is probably greater than many areas. Over 96% of the people of the world now have the Bible, or some portion of it, in their own tongue.

We are living in the days when v.10 could indeed be fulfilled. TV, radio, & the Internet can reach people with the gospel, even where we can't send missionaries.

So here we have a great motive to fulfill the Great Commission to get the gospel to the ends of the earth. He cannot, & will not come again, until the mission of the church has been completed. Furthermore, the evangelization of the world is the only hope of mankind! Science is not going to save us. Government is not going to save us. No political leader is going to save us. Jesus is the only hope of this sin-cursed world. Our Southern Baptist International Mission Board is working to reach the remaining 6,426 unreached people groups. We need to give generously to the Lottie Moon Christmas offering. Otherwise, some of our missionaries cannot be sent. We also need to pray. At the Convention we attended, our Mission Board had a wall of stickers of each unreached people group. I pulled the sticker of the Bagata people in India. Will you join me in praying that God will get the gospel to them, & open their hearts to receive it? We also need to go. One of our members, Tory Daugherty, is going with a mission team to India. Who else will go? Funds are available to help you go. Let's complete the mission!

Conclusion and Appeal: Jesus said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away." He *is* coming again. He promised. Unbelievers will face the wrath of God leading up to His return, & when He returns (2 Th. 1:8-9). If Jesus were to come today, would you be ready for the return of Christ? You're not ready if you have not repented of your sins & placed your faith in Jesus as Savior. But suppose you say, "I am going to wait until later to give my heart to Jesus." I must warn you that based on 2 Thess. 2:10-12, those who have rejected the gospel by the start of the tribulation will not repent, even in the presence of the great difficulties & judgments. For the most part, I believe the only ones who will be saved after the tribulation begins are those who haven't had an opportunity to hear. Accept Christ now while you have the opportunity!

Sources: Irvin Baxter, Jr., "Earthquakes: Sign of the End Time?" *End Time Magazine*, March/April 1995; James A. Brooks, *New American Commentary: Mark* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991); Alan Carr, www.sermonnotebook.org; William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 4 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); A.T. Robertson, *New Testament Word Pictures*, Vol. IV (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931, accessed through Online Bible); Jerry Vines (notes from sermon tape of 4/15/84); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Diligent: Mark* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1987); A. Skevington Wood, *Signs of the Times* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1970). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

See sources for parallel Scriptures: Mt. 24:1-8; Lk. 21:5-11.

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