

The Gospel of Mark

(Mid-Week Bible Study)

Week 18: Watching and Waiting Faithfully -- Mark 13:1–37

Picture Jesus walking out of the temple for the last time. The disciples, like every tourist before and since, point out the magnificence of the buildings. The stones are massive. Some of them are still visible at the base of the Western Wall today, blocks the size of small houses. “Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!” (13:1). Jesus answers with a sentence that must have stunned them. “Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down” (13:2).

The disciples are not the kind of men to let a sentence like that pass without follow-up. They walk over to the Mount of Olives, where they can sit and see the temple across the Kidron Valley, and four of them (Peter, James, John, and Andrew) come to Him privately. “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?” (13:4). Their question is specifically about the temple. The answer Jesus gives is the longest single block of His teaching in the Gospel of Mark.

Most of Mark 13 (sometimes called the Olivet Discourse) is the Lord’s detailed answer to that question. He warns of false christs and false prophets. He describes wars and rumors of wars, earthquakes and famines, persecutions of His people, the spread of the gospel to all nations. He gives a specific sign for the disciples in Judea to flee Jerusalem: “the abomination of desolation standing where he ought not to be” (13:14). He describes tribulation, false signs, and the gathering of the elect. And then, near the end, His teaching opens out to His own future return, the day and hour of which no one knows but the Father.

Mark 13 is a chapter about how disciples are to live in seasons of great upheaval, when the visible things they have leaned on are coming down and the future is full of uncertainty. The repeated command of the chapter is simple. “Be on guard.” “Stay awake.” “Watch.” Christ is not telling His disciples to make charts of the future. He is telling them to be ready, faithful, alert, and unshaken in their walk with Him, whatever comes. This week we sit with the long teaching of the King the night before His arrest and learn how He wants us to wait.

Group Discussion: Mark 13 begins with the disciples’ question about the destruction of the temple and ends with Jesus’ warning to watch for His own return. Much of the chapter has to do with the events leading up to the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, and the final paragraphs reach beyond that to His final coming. What does this chapter teach about how disciples are to live in seasons of great upheaval, how we should think about the relationship between historical events and Christ’s eventual return, and what it means to “watch” faithfully?

Personal Reflection: Jesus said four times in this chapter, “Be on guard,” “stay awake,” “watch.” Wakefulness is not anxious clock-watching about the end of the world. It is the steady, faithful walking of a disciple in every season. Where in your own life have you been functioning more like a sleepy servant than a wakeful one, and what would it look like, this week, to walk awake?

Read Mark 13:1–37

Study Questions

1. In response to the disciples’ admiration of the temple buildings, Jesus says, “There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down” (13:2). What is Jesus prophesying about the temple in Jerusalem, when did this prophecy come to historical fulfillment, and what does its historical fulfillment in AD 70 reveal about the trustworthiness of Christ’s words and the end of the Old Covenant temple system (compare Daniel 9:24–27; Matthew 23:37–24:2; Hebrews 8–10)?
2. Each generation has its own version of “wonderful stones and wonderful buildings” we are tempted to admire (institutions, traditions, structures, programs, even congregations and ministries) as though they will always stand. What visible things in your own life or in the life of the church are you tempted to lean on as if they will not pass away, and what does honest faith look like in a world where every visible structure eventually comes down?
3. In verses 5–13 Jesus warns of false christs, wars and rumors of wars, earthquakes, famines, persecutions of believers before councils and kings, and the gospel being proclaimed to all the nations before the end comes. What is Christ teaching about the normal conditions of life between His resurrection and His return, and how does He want His people to interpret turmoil, persecution, and the spread of the gospel through history?
4. Christians today, like Christians in every generation, face both real persecution somewhere in the world and the steady background noise of crisis, conflict, and confusion. Where do you find yourself most prone to fear, panic, or paralysis when the news is hard, and how does Christ’s steady command to “not be alarmed” (13:7) shape the way you receive what is happening in our day?
5. In verses 14–23 Jesus warns of “the abomination of desolation standing where he ought not to be” (13:14), tells those in Judea to flee to the mountains, and describes a severe but limited tribulation followed by false christs and false prophets working signs and wonders. Connecting this with Luke 21:20–24 and the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, what is Jesus primarily describing in this section, what does “this generation will not pass away until all these things take place” (13:30) mean, and how does a careful reading of Mark 13 actually argue against (rather than for) a future earthly thousand-year political reign of Christ?
6. Many modern Christians inherit anxious and often unbiblical pictures of the end times from popular books, films, and predictions. Where has popular “end times” thinking shaped you in ways that need to be tested against Scripture, and how does the actual New Testament

teaching about the present reign of Christ and His final return change the way you live in this present age?

7. In verses 24–27 Jesus uses dramatic Old Testament imagery (sun darkened, moon not giving light, stars falling, the powers in the heavens shaken) and speaks of the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory, sending out the angels to gather His elect. Connecting this with Isaiah 13:9–13, Daniel 7:13–14, and the New Testament passages on Christ’s final return (Acts 1:9–11; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18; 2 Thessalonians 1:5–10; 2 Peter 3:3–13; Revelation 1:7), what is Jesus teaching about both the judgment on Jerusalem (in symbolic cosmic imagery) and His own personal, bodily, visible, and final return to gather His people?
8. The return of Christ is not just a future event; it is a present horizon that shapes the way disciples live now. Where in your own life would the conscious daily expectation of Christ’s return change your priorities, your patience, your purity, or your courage, and what specific practice would help you keep that expectation fresh?
9. Jesus says explicitly, “But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father” (13:32). What does this verse teach about the Father’s exclusive knowledge of the day of Christ’s return, the reverent restraint of Christ Himself in His earthly ministry, and how every faithful Christian’s posture toward “date setting” should be one of humble refusal (compare Acts 1:7; 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11; 2 Peter 3:8–10)?
10. Mark 13 ends with the parable of the master who left on a journey, gave each of his servants work to do, and commanded the doorkeeper to stay awake (13:33–37). “What I say to you I say to all: Stay awake” (13:37). As you close this chapter, what specific work has Christ left in your hands to do, and what does it look like to stay awake at your post in the daily texture of your life this week, faithful at the door whenever He returns?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Daniel 7:13–14, the Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven and receiving everlasting dominion; Luke 21:20–24, Luke’s parallel account with explicit reference to the surrounding of Jerusalem; Acts 1:6–11, the ascension of Christ and the angelic promise that He will come “in the same way”; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–5:11, the coming of the Lord and the call to be awake and sober; 2 Peter 3:1–13, Christ’s patience, the certainty of His return, and the kind of holy lives we ought to live.