

The Beginning of the End

Mark 13:1-13

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Play Video: [If Jesus Returned Today](#).

If Jesus came back today, would He find us faithful or faithless? The question is not *when* Jesus will return but what will we *do* before He gets here? *A focus on the future will fortify our faith today.*

We come to Mark 13, which contains the longest sermon of Jesus recorded in the Gospel of Mark. In this passage Jesus preaches about the end times. This makes me smile because two weeks ago we learned about the widow's mite and established that *Jesus celebrates the sacrifice of the giver, not the size of the gift.* If we had advertised that money message, our attendance would probably have gone down that weekend. This week we announced on Facebook that this sermon is about the end times and I wonder if some of you came because of the topic.

I could be wrong about this because you are such a giving congregation. We haven't even officially launched our capital campaign for our facility project and people are already asking if they can begin giving towards it. The answer is absolutely! Simply put "Building Fund" on your check or select the "Building Fund" category if you prefer to give digitally through our app or website.

This week Pastor Ed and Pastor Kyle were seen standing by the side of the road. They each held up signs that read, "*The End is Near! Turn around before it's too late!*" The first driver yelled out as he sped by, "*You guys are religious nut cases. Leave us alone!*" From around the curve they heard screeching tires and a big splash. Ed turned to Kyle and said, "*Do you think we should just put up a sign that says, 'Bridge Out' instead?*"

There are two extremes we must avoid about the end times.

- **Sensationalizing.** For some the tendency is to obsess about biblical prophecy by trying to fit every news headline into a prophetic timeline. Paul cautions Christians against this in 2 Thessalonians 2:2: "***Not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.***"

Some believers in Thessalonica had stopped working and were just waiting for the return of Christ.

- **Trivializing.** Others don't think about the return of Christ at all and even roll their eyes at this important doctrine. 2 Peter 3:3-4: ***“Knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. They will say, ‘Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.’”***

Here are some additional points before we dive in.

1. **I feel a bit intimidated preaching on prophecy from this pulpit** (table). Pastor Brown, Edgewood's previous senior pastor, is well known throughout the QCA for his excellent teaching on this topic and knows a lot more about it than I do.
2. **I will not be giving a full explanation of all the Bible teaches on this key doctrine.** We'll simply be walking through Mark 13, which is the next step in our series through this glorious gospel. I encourage you to read Daniel 9-12 for an Old Testament perspective, dive into 1 Thessalonians 4 for information about the Rapture and for details about the Tribulation and the glorious return of Christ, I commend the entire Book of Revelation to you.
3. **This chapter is challenging to interpret.** I like the rule that Alistair Begg follows when preaching on prophecy: *“The main things are the plain things and the plain things are the main things.”*
4. **One reason this chapter is difficult is because there's a mixture of events that have already been fulfilled and other events that haven't happened yet.** This “now” and “not yet” is common in apocalyptic passages.
5. **Remember that Mark wrote his gospel to persecuted believers living in Rome.** These words from Jesus are particularly encouraging to a persecuted people. Likewise, when we experience persecution and pushback because of our faith we'll find great comfort as well.
6. **We don't know for sure when Jesus is coming back but we're certain that He is!** Did you know that for every one verse in the Bible that speaks about Jesus' first coming that there are eight more verses that describe His second coming?
7. **History and future events are linear, not cyclical.** History is “his-story” and is headed somewhere. The next big date on God's calendar is the rapture of the church and the return of Jesus Christ.

8. **The aim of prophecy is always practical.** While we want to know the “when” and “what” questions, Jesus focuses on “who” we need to be and “how” we should live in light of His return. With profound pastoral concern, Jesus is preparing us to proclaim the gospel in the midst of persecution. Prophecy is not designed to satisfy our curiosity but to sanctify our character. The question is not *when* Jesus will return but what will we *do* before He gets here. *Let’s focus on being faithful and let God handle the end of the world!*

Here’s a summary of the sermon: *The closeness of Christ’s coming should cause us to walk closely with Him today.*

We’ll focus on verses 1-13 and pick up the rest of the chapter next weekend. It would be great if you could read the entire chapter at least five times before then. BTW, we aim to post the sermon manuscript on Fridays. Marie Guyton is now preparing and posting a fill-in-the-blank sheet for taking notes and discussion questions that can be used individually, as families, or in your Growth Group.

To show how practical prophecy is, we find 18 imperatives or commands in this chapter alone! For our purposes we’ll be focusing on *four dangers to avoid* and *four duties to embrace*.

Dangers to Avoid

1. Don’t rely on outward symbols. The first part of verse 1 gives us the context: *“And as he came out of the temple...”* Jesus has been teaching in the temple and every religious group has attempted and yet failed to trip Him up. The Lord is now leaving the temple, never to return.

As the Word is withdrawing, *“one of his disciples said to him, ‘Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!’”* The word *“look”* shows this anonymous disciple’s patriotic pride and desire to have Jesus compliment the temple. The word *“wonderful”* refers to reverence and awe because this building was truly spectacular.

The original temple constructed by Solomon cost millions of dollars and took seven years to build and was eventually decimated by the Babylonians. When the Jews returned to their land 70 years later, a second temple was built. It was not as magnificent as Solomon’s but served the Jews for some 500 years. When King

Herod came to power, he wanted to impress the Jews so he remodeled and totally rebuilt the temple. At the time of this passage, it had been under construction for 46 years and would continue for another 20 years. It stood some 20 stories high and could be seen from anywhere in the city.

The stones that made up the temple were ginormous! Some measured forty feet long (that's the distance from the platform to the back pew), eighteen feet high (that's a bit higher than the chandeliers) and fifteen feet wide (about half the width of the platform). It was an engineering marvel and even to this day scholars are unsure how they transported and lifted these stones, some weighing over 600 tons! They were cut by hand and fit together so perfectly that a sheet of paper could not be inserted between the stones. Everything was overlaid with pure gold and it was said that when the sun came up no one could look at the temple because of the bright reflection.

Jesus' response in verse 2 must have stunned the disciples: ***“And Jesus said to him, ‘Do you see these great [megas] buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.’”*** The word Jesus uses for “see” means to look with perception and then He uses an emphatic double negative to communicate the coming total destruction. This reminds me of 1 Kings 9:8-9: ***“And this house will become a heap of ruins. Everyone passing by it will be astonished and will hiss, and they will say, ‘Why has the LORD done thus to this land and to this house?’ Then they will say, ‘Because they abandoned the LORD their God who brought their fathers out of the land of Egypt and laid hold on other gods and worshiped them and served them. Therefore the LORD has brought all this disaster on them.’”***

All of this was fulfilled in A.D. 70 when the temple was totally demolished under the Roman general Titus. No stones were left on top of one another. The Romans built raging fires to melt the gold and the stones crumbled.

I can think of at least two reasons why the temple was destroyed.

- **Jesus is now where people meet God.** In Matthew 12:6, Jesus declared: ***“I tell you, something greater than the temple is here!”*** That helps us understand what Jesus said in John 2:16: ***“Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.”***

- **There is no longer a need for sacrifices.** Hebrews 10:11-12: *“And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.”*

I like what Warren Wiersbe says about the temple: *“The Jewish leaders had defiled it. Jesus departs from it. The Romans would destroy it.”* Outward forms don’t work. Incidentally, this allowed Christianity to spread outside Jerusalem since there is no longer just one building that everything is anchored to.

Before we move on, I want us to see something from the first part of verse 3: *“And as he sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple...”* This location would give the disciples a panoramic view of the Temple but there’s more going on. Check out what we read in Ezekiel 11:23 about the glory of God departing from the temple and note where the glory rested: *“And the glory of the Lord went up from the midst of the city and stood on the mountain that is on the east side of the city.”* The incarnate glory of God had left the Temple. Zechariah 14:4 tells us that Jesus will come to this same location when He returns: *“On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives that lies before Jerusalem on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two...”*

2. Don’t get caught up in date setting. As Jesus and the disciples are gazing at the temple below, we read in verses 3-4: *“Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately, ‘Tell us, when will these things be and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?’”* I think it’s cool that Andrew gets included with the inner three. As the brother of Peter I wonder if he was often in the shadows of overachieving Peter. They basically have two questions – *when will this happen?* and *what will the signs be?* This is similar to the question asked in Daniel 12:6: *“How long shall it be till the end of these wonders?”* Notice that Jesus doesn’t give them what they want but He does give them what they need.

3. Don’t be led astray. It’s fascinating to me that Jesus doesn’t answer their questions in verses 5-6: *“And Jesus began to say to them, ‘See that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am he!’ and they will lead many astray.’”* The word, “see” means, *“to watch, take heed, keep your eyes open.”* He’s urging them to be on guard against spiritual imposters. There will be many messiahs who will lead many to wander away from the faith. 1 John 2:18: *“Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so*

now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour.” 1 John 4:1: “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.”

4. Don’t be alarmed. Jesus knows all of this is making them anxious so He gives one final danger to avoid in verses 7-8: *“And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. This must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. These are but the beginning of the birth pains.”* The word *“alarmed”* refers to being in tumult. He doesn’t want us to be disconcerted or diverted from our task. We certainly are hearing rumors of wars and nations are rising against nations and earthquakes are increasing in number and in intensity. All of this must take place but it is still not the end.

And then he uses the metaphor of a woman in labor. I’ve had a front row seat to this four times but that certainly doesn’t make me an expert by any means. What I do know is that the pain starts low and slow and then comes fierce and fast.

When Beth was beginning to go into labor with Emily, our first daughter, I flipped out. I ran around the house like a wild man. I tried to comfort her but didn’t know what to do – I’ll never be a poster boy for Lamaze training! I was so nervous that I called one of Beth’s friends and asked her to come over and help. Unbelievably, I went outside and started washing the car. Beth didn’t really appreciate this but I told her I would just be gone between contractions! I guess I was trying to escape, but there was nothing Beth could do to get away from those sharp pains or make them disappear. When the time came, we jumped in the car because Emily was on the way. I was pretty much useless through the whole ordeal, but at least our car was clean!

Jesus is saying that all these signs are just the *“beginning of the birth pains.”* To be forewarned about dangers to avoid is to be forearmed – *don’t rely on outward symbols, don’t get caught up in date setting, don’t be led astray and don’t be alarmed.*

The closeness of Christ’s coming should cause us to walk closely with Him today. Jesus next gives us some duties to embrace.

Duties to Embrace

1. Hardship is coming. The first duty to embrace is found in verse 9: ***“But be on your guard. For they will deliver you over to councils, and you will be beaten in synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them.”*** The phrase, ***“Be on your guard”*** is extremely emphatic and can be translated, *“You must be on your guard.”* Jesus is personalizing persecution as He uses the pronoun **“you”** ten times in verses 9-13. Being delivered over to **“councils”** is a reference to the local Sanhedrin and standing before **“kings”** shows that hardship starts local and then goes national and even international. The word **“witness”** is the word from which we get *“martyr.”*

This prophecy began to be fulfilled in the Book of Acts. In Acts 4, Peter and John stand before the Sanhedrin. In Acts 7, Stephen is condemned to death by the Sanhedrin. In Acts 12, James and Peter are arrested by King Herod and James is beheaded. In Acts 16, Paul and Silas are imprisoned in Philippi. In Acts 24, Paul is tried before a governor named Felix. In Acts 26, he is on trial before Festus and King Agrippa. And in Acts 27-28, he is sent by ship to stand trial before Caesar and then remains a prisoner in Rome until he is executed.

If you want to learn more about the plight of the persecuted today, check out the Voice of the Martyrs at persecution.com. Are you aware that over 100,000 Christians are martyred for their faith each year?

2 Timothy 3:1: ***“But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty.”*** Other translations use, *“perilous.”* This is the same word that is translated as *“savage.”* 2 Timothy 3:12: ***“Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”***

Robert P. George, professor at Princeton University, wrote an article recently entitled, *“Ashamed of the Gospel.”* Here’s part of what he says: *“The days of acceptable Christianity are over...It’s no longer easy to be a faithful Christian...”* American culture no longer favors faithful Christians, George claimed, noting in particular the derision that comes from being pro-life and pro-traditional marriage.

“They threaten us with consequences if we refuse to call what is good, evil, and what is evil, good. They demand us to conform our thinking to their orthodoxy, or else say nothing at all. The question each of us must face is this — am I ashamed of the Gospel? Am I willing to pay the price that will be demanded if I refuse to be

ashamed? Am I willing to give public witness to the massively politically incorrect truths of the gospel?"

Here's what I wrote down after reading the article: *It's easy to be a convenient Christian, but not so easy to be a convictional Christian.*

Albert Mohler, one of the sharpest minds among evangelicals, has said that there are three stages in a moral revolution.

1. What was condemned is now celebrated
2. What was celebrated is now condemned
3. Those refusing to celebrate are now condemned

An unfortunate example of this happened a couple weeks ago when a popular pastor appeared on *The View* and caved when he was asked a direct question about abortion. Not surprisingly, he received thunderous applause from the pro-choice audience. Thankfully, he has since clarified his position by making a strong pro-life statement.

Wallace Henley, a Christian columnist, wrote an article in 2015 called, "*Dear Churches in America: Prepare to Be Treated Like 1st Century Christians in Rome.*"

He listed a five step process by which a Christian's prophetic voice is silenced in a culture.

1. Marginalization
2. Caricaturization
3. Villification
4. Criminalization
5. Elimination

He writes: "*We have reached the stage of villification – conservative Christians are now regarded by the consensus establishments as the villains in 'transformed' America. The Supreme Court may well take us to the criminalization stage.*" That has since happened with the redefinition of marriage. Mike Huckabee said recently that we are experiencing the "*criminalization of Christianity.*"

BTW, I'm with Russell Moore, the president of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, who made this statement this week in light of all the repulsive behavior from many men who find themselves in the headlines: "*A church that worships Jesus stands up for vulnerable women and girls.*" And I would add that we must stand up for all children and adults, male or female, who has been abused and violated.

Any sexual harassment or assault perpetrated by politicians, business owners, news media, those in the television and film industry, or in the church is morally wrong and absolutely repugnant. We are here to help if you're hurting. I recommend *Celebrate Recovery* as a place to begin your healing.

2. Herald the gospel. Our next duty in the midst of difficulty is to deliver the good news of the gospel. Check out verse 10: "***And the gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations.***" The word "***must***" shows urgency, the word "***first***" shows primacy and "***all nations***" speaks of the universality of our message. Matthew 24:14 adds, "***...and then the end will come.***" We could call this the Great Commission condition. The consummation will not come until this condition is met.

In one sense the gospel has already gone out to the whole world but the word "***nations***" here refers to people groups. Are you aware that there are still around *7,000 unreached people groups* in the world today? We're called to take the gospel to every tribe and tongue, to every culture and ethnicity.

What that means is that we need more missionaries and we need to send them to the least reached parts of the world. We've been giving some strategic attention to this as our most recent go global partners have been sent to India.

I want to address something that we need to correct. While it's true that every Christian is called to live on mission in the context of our families, neighborhoods, workplaces and campuses, we are not all missionaries in the strict definition of that word. The word "*missionary*" refers to being sent out across a boundary or border to make the gospel known where it is not known or understood.

In a new book called, *When Everything is Missions*, the authors conclude: "*If every Christian is already considered a missionary, then all can stay put where they are, and nobody needs to get up and go anywhere to preach the gospel. But if our only*

concern is to witness where we are, how will people in unevangelized areas ever hear the gospel?”

I'm concerned that fewer young believers are considering a call to cross-cultural missionary work or to full-time ministry. Many of you know that I'm a graduate of Moody Bible Institute. Beth and I met there. Our oldest daughter is a Moody grad and Megan, our youngest, is a freshman there right now. Moody Radio is part of the Edgewood Go Team in the QCA and our sermons are aired twice on Sundays. I love Moody and what it stands for! Just recently, Moody announced that they will be closing their Spokane campus and making several other cost-saving adjustments. While there are many contributing factors behind these decisions, at the top is that there are fewer young people considering full-time ministry or missions today.

I'm greatly challenged by this. Let's continue to pray that God will raise up young people here at Edgewood as workers to go into the harvest. If you're a teen or twenty-something, would you pray every day about how God might want to use you in this way? We'll hear more about how God is raising up laborers next weekend. Jesus tells us how to pray in Matthew 9:38: ***“Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”*** I like what Ray Pritchard posted on Facebook Friday: *“‘Your will be done.’ All spiritual growth begins with those four words.”*

3. Help from the Holy Spirit. Jesus reminds us that we're not alone when we're persecuted for proclaiming the gospel in verse 11: ***“And when they bring you to trial and deliver you over, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit.”*** In the midst of suffering we have something to say and someone to help us say it. We see this fulfilled in Acts 4:8 when Peter was forced in front of hostile religious leaders: ***“Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them...”*** And in Acts 6:10 we read what was said about Stephen right before they stoned him to death: ***“But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking.”***

4. Hatred from those close. Jesus promises even more persecution in verses 12-13. And this time it will be very personal as even family members will turn on the faithful: ***“And brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death. And you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be***

saved.” Just recently a father in Saudi Arabia cut out his own daughter’s tongue and then burned her to death because she had converted to Christianity.

While most of like to be liked, Jesus tells us that we **“we will be hated by all”** for His name’s sake. This word means, *“to loathe.”* One pastor puts it this way: *“They hate us because we stand for everything they are against and we are against everything they stand for.”*

Jesus ends this section by declaring that true believers will demonstrate the reality of their salvation by standing strong. *We prove our possession of faith by staying true to our profession of faith.* Others who are not genuine believers won’t fare so well and will bail as 1 John 2:19 says: **“They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.”** *Persecution is terrible but unfaithfulness to God is far worse.* I’m glad we don’t have to stand alone, aren’t you? Romans 14:4: **“And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand.”**

The closeness of Christ’s coming should cause us to walk closely with Him today. Let’s avoid these dangers – don’t rely on outward symbols, don’t get caught up in date setting, don’t be led astray and don’t be alarmed. And let’s embrace these duties – hardship is coming, herald the gospel, rely on the help of the Holy Spirit, and expect hatred from those close to us.

Action Steps

Let’s wrap up with some lessons for living in the last days.

1. Live out your faith. Do you live more like the world than as a follower of the Word? The study of God’s prophetic program is always meant to have a purifying effect on His people. 1 John 3:2-3: **“...we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.”**

2. Rearrange your priorities. I like what D.L. Moody once said: *“I have been working three times as hard since I came to understand that my Lord is coming again.”* When Jesus returns, do you want to be found lazy? Do you want Him to come back while you’re nursing that grudge? Do you want Him to return when friction and unforgiveness is tearing your marriage apart? Do you want Him to

appear when you've not been giving of your financial resources to expand His kingdom? Would you have been OK if He had returned when you were involved in that secret sin this week?

3. Encourage one another. After describing the rapture, Paul concludes 1 Thessalonians 4 this way: ***“Therefore encourage one another with these words.”*** To “encourage” means to come alongside someone and give him or her whatever help they need. Here are some practical ideas:

- Talk about the return of Christ at least once a day.
- Interject the second coming into conversations by using the phrase, *“Maranatha.”* This word is found at the end of the Book of Revelation and means, *“Come, Lord Jesus.”*
- Pepper your prayers with references to His return.

4. Tell lost people about the Lord. Don't get so caught up in prophecy that you forget to point people to Christ. In Acts 1:7, in response to some more questions about the timing of His second coming, Jesus said: ***“It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.”*** We're not to be focused on date setting but instead we're called to be Spirit-empowered witnesses. Look at the very next verse: ***“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”*** (Acts 1:8). Instead of wondering, we should be worshipping and witnessing.

5. Repent and receive Christ. Don't delay -- you could die today! Or, Jesus could come back tonight. Do you know why Christ has not returned yet? It's because God is giving you time to repent now...before it's too late. Listen to 2 Peter 3:8-10: ***“But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.”***

I don't know how to say this any other way. If you don't know Jesus, you have an appointment with judgment. And there is no escape unless you put your faith in Jesus Christ this very moment. It's your choice. What will it be? Do you want to

face ruin? Or, do you want to be rescued? Do you want to go to heaven or to hell? Do you want deliverance or destruction? Flee to Jesus now before it's too late...so that you're not left behind.

The closeness of Christ's coming should cause us to walk closely with Him today.

Closing Song: "I Wish We'd All Been Ready"

Benediction - Titus 2:11-14: *"For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works."*