

## **Don't Be Left Behind**

Mark 13:14-37

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The anableps is a minnow-like fish that can see below and above the water surface at the same time. The top half of its eye has an air lens and the bottom half has a water lens, which amounts to a set of bifocals, allowing this fish to see the upper and the underworld. This helps it find lunch and avoid becoming lunch as well. It's nearly impossible to catch this fish off guard!

In a similar way, we have been created to look up and down as well. While we live in this world, we must make sure we're locked into the world to come so that we're not caught off guard.

Last weekend we drilled into the first 13 verses of Mark 13 and established that *the closeness of Christ's coming should cause us to walk closely with Him today*. We're to avoid four 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 we're to embrace four duties – *recognize that hardship is coming, make sure we're heralding the gospel, lean on the help of the Holy Spirit, and expect hatred from those close to us*.

I contacted my friend Ray Pritchard this week to ask permission to quote from one of his sermons that deals with the end times. Ray is president of Keep Believing Ministries, one of our Go Team partners. He's the author of *Anchor for the Soul* and the new Christmas devotional called, *Simple Christmas*, available as a free eBook on Amazon.

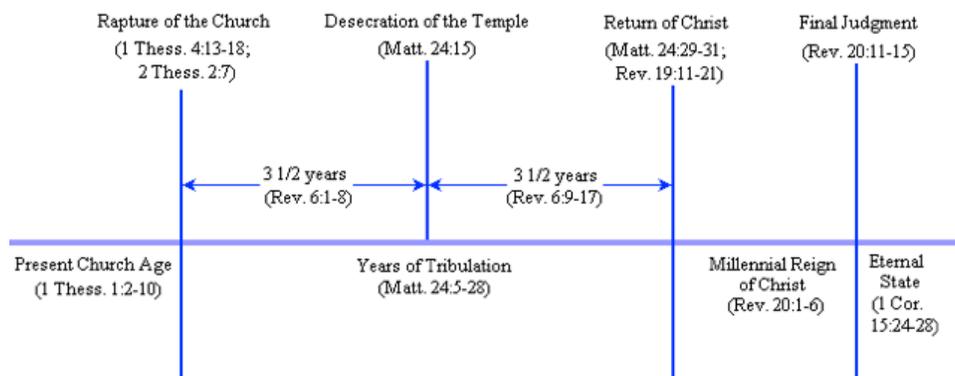
I like how he summarizes his understanding of end-times prophecy: “...*While Christians have always believed in the return of Christ, they have often disagreed over the details. In our day there is a lively debate over how the Rapture (I Thessalonians 4:13-18) relates to the Second Coming (Mark 13). Some see them as the same event. Others see them as separated by three-and-a-half years or seven years.*”

*...I think this is an area where Christians can sincerely see things in different ways [because] the New Testament presents the truth of the Second Coming in various passages that offer different pictures of the return of Christ. Those pictures (or*

*images, if you will) are not entirely the same. No one passage tells us everything. No matter which view you hold, you have to think about how Matthew 24 [and Mark 13] relates to 1 & 2 Thessalonians and how those passages relate to [Daniel and] the book of Revelation.*

*Many Bible students (myself included) believe that Christ’s return will occur in two stages. This is usually called the “Pre-Tribulation Rapture” view. That is, we believe Christ will come before the Tribulation to resurrect Christians [who have died] and to “rapture” or lift off the earth living believers.*

This simple chart summarizes my views.



*[Then] the horrors of the seven-year Tribulation (the “70th week” of Daniel 9:24-27) will unfold on earth. The Antichrist will be revealed and he will commit the “abomination that causes desolation” at the midpoint of the Tribulation. The last three-and-a-half years will be marked by a succession of judgments that result in the near-total destruction of human society. When humanity [chooses] to follow the Antichrist...Jesus will return from heaven with the saints and angels at his side. He will defeat the Antichrist and establish his kingdom on the earth (Revelation 19-20).”*

We come today to the section of Scripture that describes the events of the Tribulation. Jesus now begins to answer the question asked in verse 4: **“When will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?”** Let me just say that I’m OK if you disagree with my understanding of the end times. While we might see the details differently related to the return of Christ, we can all agree that’s He’s coming again...and because He is, we must be ready right now.

## Signs to Look For

Chuck Swindoll tells the story of a man, who in 1938 ordered an expensive, extremely sensitive barometer from a very respected company. When it arrived, he was disappointed to discover that the needle was stuck on the dial marked “hurricane.” After shaking his new gauge several times to no avail, he decided to write a scathing letter to the manufacturer. He mailed the letter the next day on his way out of town. When he returned home he found that his barometer was missing – along with his house that had been hurtled away by a hurricane!

The Bible is our barometer. We’re going to see that it’s pointing to a holy hurricane, to a terrible time of tribulation. Jesus gives us at least five specific signs in verses 14-27.

**1. The Gross Abomination.** Listen to verses 14-18: ***“But when you see the abomination of desolation standing where he ought not to be (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. <sup>15</sup> Let the one who is on the housetop not go down, nor enter his house, to take anything out, <sup>16</sup> and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak. <sup>17</sup> And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! <sup>18</sup> Pray that it may not happen in winter.”***

The first three and one-half years of the Great Tribulation will be relatively peaceful but everything will change when the ***“abomination of desolation”*** will appear. This literally reads, *“the abomination that makes desolate, or defiles.”* The word ***“abomination”*** means, *“detestable, loathing, foul and nauseous.”* This gross event will take place in the future, after the temple is rebuilt in Jerusalem.

We know from Daniel 11:31 that this prophecy, like so many others, has multiple fulfillments. This event was partially fulfilled in history and will be completely fulfilled in the future: ***“Forces from him shall appear and profane the temple and fortress, and shall take away the regular burnt offering. And they shall set up the abomination that makes desolate.”*** History tells us that a pagan king named Antiochus Euphianes entered the Jewish temple in 167 B.C. and offered a pig on the altar, set up a statue of Zeus in the Holy of Holies, and ran a brothel from the rooms in the temple. Because he had so defiled the temple, the Jews stopped using it for a period of time. Fast forward to A.D. 68 when murders took place in the temple. In A.D. 70, the Roman general Titus entered the Holy of Holies and

removed items that were considered holy. Both of these events foreshadow what will happen during the Tribulation.

While all of this is gross, the ultimate abomination will come when the Antichrist will break a seven-year peace treaty after three and one-half years by entering the temple. Listen to 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4: ***“Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction,<sup>4</sup> who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.”*** This will be a real man.

Those who are alive when this happens are to flee quickly to the mountains because this event will trigger a time of terrible tribulation. I was intrigued to read of the North Korean defector this week who ran for his life to escape the terrible conditions. He was shot several times but eventually made it to safety. In a similar way, those left behind must flee quickly once the abomination of desolation takes place.

**2. The Great Tribulation.** This time of tribulation is described in verses 19-20: ***“For in those days there will be such tribulation as has not been from the beginning of the creation that God created until now, and never will be.<sup>20</sup> And if the Lord had not cut short the days, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect, whom he chose, he shortened the days.”*** Again we see this is a future event because Jesus uses the phrase, ***“in those days.”*** The word ***“such”*** means ***“much or great”*** and ***“tribulation”*** refers to, ***“breaking, squeezing, pressing and crushing.”*** For more details of the Tribulation, see Revelation 4-18.

This is not just a tough time or difficulty but rather has never been seen since the creation of the world and will never be again. Daniel 12:1 refers to it this way: ***“And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time.”*** Born again believers will not be here for this. This time of unspeakable horror will be so severe that over half of the world’s population will die. If God doesn’t limit it to three and one-half years, no human being will be able to survive it.

**3. The Grand Deception.** The great tribulation will also bring about a grand deception as seen in verses 21-23: ***“And then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘Look, there he is!’ do not believe it.<sup>22</sup> For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform signs and wonders, to lead astray, if possible, the***

*elect.* <sup>23</sup> ***But be on guard; I have told you all things beforehand.***” Humans have always gravitated toward false messiahs like Charles Manson, who died this past week. He had 100 followers who ended up murdering some 35 people.

During the great tribulation, Satan will strive to seduce many through a grand deception, even using miracles to make it seem like he’s legit. When the world goes out of whack, people will fall for false messiahs. Listen to 2 Thessalonians 2:9: ***“The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders.”*** Revelation 13:13-14 says that the antichrist will perform ***“great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people,*** <sup>14</sup> ***and by the signs that it is allowed to work in the presence of the beast it deceives those who dwell on earth.”***

**4. The Global Demonstration.** At the end of the great tribulation and grand deception the entire cosmos will spin into chaos as seen in verses 24-25: ***“But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light,*** <sup>25</sup> ***and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.”*** Notice that all this will happen at the end of the tribulation: ***“after that tribulation.”*** Matthew 24:29 states that it will be ***“immediately after.”***

Listen to Revelation 6:12-14: ***“When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood,*** <sup>13</sup> ***and the stars of the sky fell to the earth...The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up...”***

All of this makes me think of Amos 8:9: ***“‘And on that day,’ declares the Lord GOD, ‘I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight.’”*** It’s fascinating that when God the Father poured out his wrath on His Son on the cross, Matthew 27:45 says, ***“Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour.”***

**5. The Glorious Revelation.** After this global demonstration of the wrath of God, verses 26-27 proclaim the glorious revelation of Jesus Christ: ***“And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.*** <sup>27</sup> ***And then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.”*** Jesus won’t come again as a babe in the manger but as a conquering king.

- **He will come in splendor.** When we read of Jesus coming in clouds, this is a reference to the Shekinah glory cloud of God Himself as seen in the Old Testament. In Mark 9:7, Jesus was transfigured *“and a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, ‘This is my beloved Son; listen to him.’”* When Jesus ascended into heaven, Acts 1:9-11 tell us that a cloud received Him out of their sight. Revelation 1:7 says that the whole world will see Him when he appears: *“Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.”*
- **He will come in strength.** When Jesus comes He will do so with great power. Revelation 19:15-16 says that Jesus will appear on a white horse and *“from his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.”*
- **He will come with salvation.** He will then send out the angels to *“gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.”* According to Revelation 7, these are those who get saved during the Tribulation through the efforts of 144,000 evangelists. According to Revelation 6:8, many others will be martyred.

Jesus then gives two word pictures or parables to help us see the importance of not being left behind.

**1. Don’t miss the signs of the Savior.** Listen to verses 28-31: *“From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. <sup>29</sup> So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. <sup>30</sup> Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. <sup>31</sup> Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.”*

At one level this is a simple illustration about how trees begin to put out leaves when the summer is near. What we’ve just read are signs that the Savior is about to appear.

Verse 30 is a very intriguing verse: ***“Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.”*** There are at least five different interpretations of what ***“this generation”*** might mean.

- Some believe that everything in Mark 13 was fulfilled during the generation of the disciples. This view is often called *preterism*.
- Others point out that ***“generation”*** can also be translated as *“this type of generation”* to refer to a group of people like in Mark 8:38. In other words, *“generation”* speaks of the nation of Israel, a category of people, not in the sense of a period of time. God’s chosen nation will be preserved to the very end. Romans 11:26 says: ***“All Israel will be saved.”***
- Related to this, some see the fig tree, since it is a symbol for Israel, as an illustration that God still has plans for His people, Israel. Some commentators believe that this is a reference to Israel becoming a nation in 1948. BTW, since a generation is typically thought of as 40 years, many believed that Jesus was going to come back in 1988.
- Still others believe that the generation that was alive in 1948 when Israel became a nation will be alive when Jesus returns. In this view Jesus will come back before 2048.
- One other view is that the generation that sees the signs of the end will also see the end itself.

Some combination of the final four views makes sense to me.

I’m encouraged that in the midst of uncertainty and unsettledness, and the fact that heaven and earth will pass away, we can totally count on the Word of God lasting forever. Isaiah 40:8: ***“The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.”***

**2. Don’t be spiritually asleep.** Jesus gives a final call to his followers to make sure we don’t go asleep spiritually. Listen for the admonition to ***“keep awake”*** or ***“stay awake”*** four different times in verses 32-37: ***“But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”***<sup>33</sup> ***Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come.***<sup>34</sup> ***It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake.***<sup>35</sup> ***Therefore stay awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in***

*the morning—<sup>36</sup> lest he come suddenly and find you asleep.<sup>37</sup> And what I say to you I say to all: **Stay awake.***”

To “*stay awake*” means to be constantly awake, attentive and watchful. It’s the opposite of being a spiritual slacker. Romans 13:11: “*the hour has come for you to wake from sleep.*” I’m challenged by Revelation 3:2-3: “*Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God. Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you.*”

The Lord is looking for workers who are awake. It’s at precisely this point that Matthew records two parables about preparation (lamps) and stewardship (talents).

What we can learn from this is while we’re waiting; we must be working and witnessing. Or to say another way, we must be wide-awake and spiritually alert so that we can *gather, grow, give* and *go* with the gospel like never before.

Dr. Horatius Bonar, a Scottish hymn writer from the 1800’s, had a custom every night and every morning. When he’d draw the curtains before going to bed, he’d say, “*Perhaps tonight, Lord!*” And in the morning, he’d open the curtains, look up and say, “*Perhaps today, Lord!*”

Live as if it might be today and one day you won’t be disappointed. If you don’t know Jesus don’t wait another day. Don’t be caught unprepared and end up being left behind.

Let’s look up *and* look down. As we do, we’ll see the need all around us...because we don’t want to leave anyone behind.

**Transition.** I love the phrase found in the middle of verse 34: “*each with his work.*” We’re going to transition now by celebrating the work of witnessing taking place through Edgewood.

Pastor Dan

- Kylie
- Puerto Rico
- QC Ministries

Kyle

- Joel Interview
- Introduce Canada and India
- Set-up video

Brian Close