

Text: Mark 13

Theme: Series-The Servant King: The End of All Things

Sermon delivered by Revd Canon Dele Agbelusi during Service of the Word on 25/02/2018 at 10.30am

Summary

To grasp this long and detailed passage, we need to understand that many Bible prophecies have got what we call multiple fulfilment. Jesus is following in the tradition of Old Testament prophets by predicting an event in the near future that is also a foretaste of a more distant event. Theologians call this 'telescoping'. Isaiah did this by predicting that a son would be born to a virgin (Isa. 7), as a sign to King Ahaz in his own day, but that prediction also serves as a pointer to the ultimate Son who would be born to Virgin Mary in Bethlehem 700 years later. Likewise, in this passage, Jesus predicts the upcoming destruction of the Jewish Temple (v. 2), and the terrible days that would surround it (vv. 17-19), and that prediction serves as a springboard to describe the events that will surround the second coming of Christ. Jesus doesn't tell us these things to alarm us, but so that we will be watchful (vv.32-37). We do not know when Jesus will come, so we need to be busy about our Master's business, holy in our lifestyle, and diligent in prayer, so we will be ready for our Lord's return.

Let us live each day as though it were the last. If you were told that you had a week left to live before Jesus returns through the clouds, what priorities would you change in your life? Hurry up, then, because you may not have a week ...

Mark 13:1-2 plays a key role in the framing of the discourse. The disciples asked two questions in One! *"Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings! Do you see all these great buildings? Replied Jesus. 'Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.'"*

(Verses 3 and 4) *"As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John and Andrew asked him privately, 'Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all to be fulfilled?'"* **With this view, the first question in the mind of the disciples was about the destruction of the temple. Jesus said it would be destroyed, and they wanted to know when. Mark does not record Jesus' answer to this first question, but Luke does in Luke 21:8-23.** As great as the temple was, Jesus never hesitated to claim that He was greater than the temple (Matthew 12:5). This temple was originally rebuilt by Zerubbabel and Ezra (Ezra 6:15) but greatly expanded and improved by Herod. It was the centre of Jewish life for almost 1,000 years – so much so, that it was customary to swear by the temple (Matthew 23:16) and speaking against the temple could be considered blasphemy (Acts 6:13). **For many Jews of that day, the temple had become an idol – it subtly began to mean more to the people than God Himself meant. The temple was a good thing, but good things can become the worst idols. Sometimes God sours even good things if we allow them to become our idols.**

The second question is answered in the remainder of Mark 13. This question was asked perhaps as they remembered the events surrounding the last temple's destruction: the temple was destroyed in the context of national judgment and exile. If the temple will be destroyed, then what will become of Israel and the Jews? Furthermore, Jesus saw beyond the destruction of the Temple to the events leading to His second coming and the end of the age.

What will Not Be the Sign

Be careful that none deceive you, claiming to be the Christ.

(Verses 6-8) In these verses, Jesus prophesied that three kinds of events would occur before the fall of Jerusalem. First, many would appear saying, "I am he; I am the Christ"

(Matthew 24:4). The disciples must not believe these false Christs (verses 21-22). Many of these false Christs did appear before the fall of Jerusalem (see Acts 5:36-37). Second, Jesus said that there would be wars and rumours of wars between nations. Indeed, in 62-66 A.D., only a few years before Jerusalem was destroyed, there were many wars throughout the Roman Empire and many rumours of revolts against the emperor. Third, Jesus said that there would be earthquakes in various places, and famines. Indeed, there were famines in various parts of the Roman Empire before the destruction of Jerusalem (Acts 11:28). In effect, Jesus said, "Catastrophes will happen, but these do not signal the end." Man has often thought that such things would signal the end, but Jesus would point to a more specific sign to watch for.

(Verses 9-13) You must be on your guard.

They will deliver you up to councils. This persecution was not the sign of the end, but simply should be expected. Jesus also promised that before the end the gospel must go out to the whole world. The presence of persecution does not relieve the Church of this responsibility.

When they arrest you and deliver you up, do not worry beforehand, or premeditate what you will speak. At that moment, the Holy Spirit would give you words to say. A powerful example of this principle is found in Acts 4:1-22, where Peter and the other disciples made a dramatic proclamation of Jesus before the hostile Sanhedrin.

Here Jesus spoke of the inspiration that comes at a moment of persecution, not of teaching in the church. "There is no excuse for the lazy preacher who fails to prepare his sermon out of the mistaken reliance upon the Holy Spirit." (Robertson)

Brother will betray brother to death. It is easy for us to underestimate how difficult a time of persecution can be. While few Christians in the Western world face persecution, Christians in other parts of the world often face these trials. If I came from an orthodox Jewish family, they might consider me a blasphemer and account me as dead for choosing Jesus. If I came from a strict Muslim family, I might be rejected by my family and be literally killed for choosing Jesus. If I came from a Hindu family in India, I could be rejected and martyred for choosing Jesus. In China, I would be allowed to practice Christianity only in the state-sponsored church – or be persecuted. My church might be one of the 1,500 destroyed or shut down since November of 2000. In Sudan, I might be killed or literally enslaved by a Muslim army. In Indonesia, I might be given a choice by Muslims to convert to Islam or die, or I might have my church bombed during a worship service. In Pakistan, I might be jailed by Muslim government officials.

Do Not Believe Everything

We must test everything by the Bible. Jesus warns us that false teachers will come. He tells us that some teachers will say: 'Jesus has come back'. You may think that they are good people. They may do miracles. They may tell good stories. They may tell you that the Christian life is easy. But they deceive' people. That means they make people believe lies.

This is very important. Many Christians are too quick to believe things. How do we know when a teaching is wrong? It is in the bible that Abraham, Jacob and David married more than one wife. Is that an example for us to follow? What does Jesus say about it?

(Verse 14) But "When you see the abomination that causes desolation...let the reader understand that the sequence of events begins here. Thus, Jesus answers the first question- "What are the signs for the demise of the temple (the end of the Jewish world, so to say)"

What to Do When You See the Sign

Those in Judea are to flee to the mountains - Mark 13:14-20. Don't delay by going to your homes and getting your clothes. b. It will be a difficult time for pregnant and nursing mothers. Pray that your flight be not in winter (when travel is difficult) or on the Sabbath (when city gates are closed to travel). d. There will be "great tribulation", though shortened for the elect's sake.

All the calamities which had befallen any nation from the beginning of the world were but small in comparison with those of the Jews : (a) In the siege of Jerusalem, no fewer than 1,100,000 perished (it was during the time of the Passover, when more than 3,000,000 Jews were assembled): (b) In surrounding provinces 250,000 were slain: c) 97,000 were taken captive, some killed by beasts in Roman theatres, some sent to work in Egypt, others sold as slaves (Flavius Josephus, Jewish Wars, quoted by Barnes on Matthew).

The second coming of the Son of Man

Don't be misled by false Christs and false prophets – Mark 13:21-23, even those who show great signs and wonders to deceive, for the coming (judgment) of the Son of Man will be like lightning across the sky and **No One** knows the time or the hour (v.32).

The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars of heaven will fall: Immediately before the return of Jesus, before His coming in the clouds with great power and glory, the world will be wracked by cosmic catastrophes. In a sense, this will be the groaning of all creation (Romans 8:22) and it will come to one last crescendo before the return of Jesus. But it will be like a flash in the sky and it will be too late for anyone who is not prepared. "At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And He will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds; from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens" (verses 26 and 27).

But you must watch

(Verses 32-37) The emphasis again is **readiness and watchfulness**. "But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come...It is like a man going to a far country..."

That day and hour no one knows, even the Son, but only the Father: How could Jesus not know that day and hour? Did not He, as God, know all things? Jesus did not know this, but it was not because He gave up His omniscience – He is the unchanging God. It was because He voluntarily, in submission to God the Father, restricted His knowledge of this event.

Some people have the idea, "We don't know when Jesus is coming, so it doesn't really matter." Others have the idea, "We don't know when Jesus is coming, so we have to find out and set a date." The right response is, "I don't know when Jesus is coming so I have to be alert, eager, and ready for His coming."

How can we do this? Let Jesus take over the rein of your life. Let him give you a new heart as he comes into your life. A new heart, coming from Jesus as a gift to you, is the only abode where Jesus will stay. His life blood paid for it and if you receive him by faith and submit to his Lordship, you have got nothing to fear. Come to Jesus. Do not delay.