

First Serve

Studies in the Gospel of Mark

Text

Mark 13:1-37

Topic

Jesus explains that believers will be able to know
His Second Coming is near just like you can know
that summer is near by looking at a tree

Title

"Watch Out for that Tree!"

Introduction

It's a common theme in literature and in films, partly because it is something we can all relate to. **Stay on the path**, being mindful that there will be deceptions, distractions, and disastrous detours along the way.

Dorothy, the Scarecrow, the Tin Man, and the Cowardly Lion are on the Yellow Brick Road. Along the way, Dorothy and her friends are hindered and menaced by the Wicked Witch of the West. She incites trees to throw apples at them, then tries to set the Scarecrow on fire. Within sight of the city, the witch conjures up a field of poppies that causes sleep. Glinda saves them by making it snow, which counteracts the effects of the poppies.

In *The Hobbit*, Bilbo and the company of dwarves is warned by Gandalf and Beorn to not stray from the path through Mirkwood Forrest. The Forrest plays tricks on their minds. Eventually they see a light and leave the path, to their great dismay and disaster.

Swim *through* the trench, not *over* it, the school of fish tells Dory. Marlin disregards the warning and the two of them nearly are killed from coming in contact with the jellies.

In our verses, Jesus gives His followers a glimpse into the near and the far future. It's called the Olivet Discourse, because it was delivered on the Mount of Olives. It is a discourse rich with prophetic insights.

Don't overlook that throughout His comments, Jesus was encouraging His followers to stay on the path, to stay the spiritual course, despite the things that would try to *stumble* them, or *overtake* them.

- In verse five Jesus says, "take heed that no one deceives you."
- In verse thirteen Jesus says, "he who endures to the end shall be saved."
- In verse twenty-three Jesus says, "take heed."
- In verse thirty-five Jesus says, "watch."
- In verse thirty-seven Jesus says, "and what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!"

With the destruction of the second Temple just decades away, and the construction of a third Temple in the future, Jesus was concerned that His followers stay on the path.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Don't Let The Destruction Of The Second Temple Stumble You, and #2 Don't Let The Construction Of The Third Temple Overtake You.

#1 Don't Let The Destruction Of The Second Temple Stumble You

(v1-13)

I spent considerable time in our last study describing the magnificence of the Temple. It was called Herod's Temple after King Herod, who was an extraordinary visionary builder. Construction began in 20BC and continued until 64AD.

The original Temple was built by Solomon and destroyed by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in 586BC. After their seventy-year exile in Babylon was over, Zerubbabel oversaw the rebuilding of the Temple. Herod's project was considered a build-out of the second Temple, not a third Temple.

Mar 13:1 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!"

Every year, when the disciples visited the Temple at Passover (or for one of the other feasts), they were awestruck by it. Jesus was about to let them in on the future of the Temple, and it would assault their preconceptions.

Mar 13:2 And Jesus answered and said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone shall be left upon another, that shall not be thrown down."

What was prophecy to the twelve is history to us. Titus and his legions destroyed the Temple in 70AD. Despite orders to the contrary, the soldiers burned the structure, and razed it to the ground. The way the story is usually told, the fires melted the gold ornamenting the stones, getting into the cracks. To retrieve the gold, the stones were overturned until none were left standing.

Mar 13:3 Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked Him privately,
Mar 13:4 "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign when all these things will be fulfilled?"

The twelve were in Kingdom-now mode. They fully expected Jesus to be installed as King, and to inaugurate the Kingdom of God on the earth. They knew from reading their Scriptures that the Temple played a crucial role in the Kingdom, so they were understandably confused about its prophesied destruction.

Taking Jesus' comments from verse five through verse thirteen as a unit, His main concern is that disciples who live during the time the second Temple is destroyed not be stumbled by thinking that somehow God's plans for history have been thwarted.

He was not so much giving us a chronology as He was issuing a warning to disciples at any stage along the prophetic timeline after His ascension into Heaven.

Atop the mountain, they were about 100' higher than the highest point of the Temple, looking down upon it. Since this was the Mount of Olives, scholars have named this talk The Olivet Discourse.

Mar 13:5 And Jesus, answering them, began to say: "Take heed that no one deceives you.

Mar 13:6 For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am He,' and will deceive many.

Deception is characteristic of the entire time Jesus has been absent from the earth. Whether it's someone claiming to be the Christ, or some new religion, or some secular discovery, literally millions have been led astray to a Christ-less eternity.

Mar 13:7 But when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be troubled; for such things must happen, but the end is not yet.
Mar 13:8 For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom...

Wars are inevitable. God is not the cause of them. They arise out of our sinful, selfish natures. We can't "all just get along."

Wars worry people that the end is near. Especially in the nuclear era, there is always talk that mankind will wipe itself out. It incites tremendous fear in people, even the people of God.

Mankind will not wipe itself out. God has an endgame. It isn't nuclear winter.

Mar 13:8 ... And there will be earthquakes in various places, and there will be famines and troubles. These are the beginnings of sorrows.

Natural disasters unnerve us as well. My favorite line of dialog from *World War Z* is, "Mother Nature is a serial killer. No one's better. Or more creative."

We fear that in just a few weeks, a natural or man-made pandemic could decimate the population of the planet. It can seem as though we won't ever make it to Armageddon.

We **are** going to get to the prophesied end. God works by His providence to bring His program forward.

"Beginnings of sorrows" can be translated, "the beginning of birth pangs." That's better, because it is hopeful.

No woman enjoys birth pangs, but as they come with greater frequency and intensity, you know they'll soon be over, and you'll have given birth.

Jesus was saying that all the things which might worry you that God's promises about the future will fail, are only pangs along the way. Things will end according to plan.

Mar 13:9 "But watch out for yourselves, for they will deliver you up to councils, and you will be beaten in the synagogues. You will be brought before rulers and kings for My sake, for a testimony to them.

Jesus' concern is for His followers. We must "watch out" that we are not deceived, or distracted, to take a detour from following Him, because we do not see how things are working out.

You see this type of persecution in the Book of Acts, and it continues throughout the church age, right through today's persecution of Christians. It is intended to stop believers from sharing about Jesus. We must not think it strange, but remember that Jesus predicted it.

Mar 13:10 And the gospel must first be preached to all the nations.

This is first an encouragement to the original disciples that, even though they would be severely persecuted, and even martyred, it would not prevent their mission of going into all the world preaching the Gospel.

Russia is banning all forms of evangelism outside of the walls of a church building. You can't even e-mail an invite to church. You know what will happen? **The church will grow and thrive.**

The Gospel cannot fail to be preached; God will see to it, in this age, and in the future. Looking to the future, in the Great Tribulation, the Gospel will be preached, literally, to every creature on the earth, by many empowered witnesses, and even by an angel.

Every-other article I read in contemporary Christian magazines, or on blogs, is about how the church is failing. Notwithstanding we must be certain we remain on task as a local church, the church cannot fail, and will not fail.

Mar 13:11 But when they arrest you and deliver you up, do not worry beforehand, or premeditate what you will speak. But whatever is given you in that hour, speak that; for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit.

We see this, too, in The Book of Acts. The religious authorities marveled at the disciples as they answered charges against them, noting that they were ignorant men who had been with Jesus.

This promise continues throughout the church age. If you find yourself "delivered up," God will, by His Spirit, give you power to be His witness.

Mar 13:12 Now brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death.

Here is a headline from the Christian Post, from just 6 months ago (November 2015): *Egyptian Mother of 2 Has Throat Slit by Family for Converting to Christianity*.

Jesus is concerned we not stray from the path on account of family pressures.

Family pressures are intense trials for Christians. Right here in little 'ole Kings County, many Roman Catholic families exert intense pressures on you if you get saved. A lot of folks end up compromising in order to not offend grandma or grandpa.

Mar 13:13 And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end shall be saved.

Now, it's sadly true, that Christians are disliked, and even hated, for being harsh, judgmental, and cruel. But Jesus was talking about all manner of people hating believers who faithfully represent Him in their witness.

How illogical is it, to hate a person who loves you enough to risk their own livelihood or life to see you saved from perishing eternally? Yet that is exactly the kind of attack that you can expect.

We argue over the phrase, "he who endures to the end shall be saved." It might seem to emphasize our effort in remaining saved; but it doesn't.

A saved person endures; a saved person perseveres to the end. It is the evidence you are genuinely saved - not the requirement for being saved.

One commentator put it this way: "This endurance does not produce salvation; it is Spirit-empowered perseverance and proof of the reality of salvation in the person who endures."

Another said: "Perseverance is a result and outward sign, not the basis, of spiritual genuineness. A person genuinely saved by grace through faith endures to the end and will experience the consummation of his salvation."

One more quote: "This cannot mean that they will receive eternal salvation because of their endurance; **that would be a false gospel.**"

Jesus' immediate disciples were consumed with thoughts of the Kingdom of God being established. They argued over who would be greatest in it, and asked Jesus for positions of power in it. Jesus had been hailed as King in His triumphal entry - just as predicted in the Scriptures.

After Jesus rose from the dead, the disciples would still be focused on the Kingdom. They would ask Him about it right up until Jesus ascended into Heaven.

At the Ascension, they kept staring up into Heaven, as if they expected Jesus to be coming right back to set up the Kingdom.

He didn't. They Waited in Jerusalem, as commanded by Jesus, and they received the Holy Spirit. They immediately started on their Great Commission, and the predicted persecution began. Martyrdoms followed.

Then the Temple would be destroyed. It could shake the faith of these disciples, wondering what was to become of the Old Testament promises of the Kingdom, and of a Temple on the earth.

Wars and rumors of wars... Natural disasters... Family betrayals. Jesus told them - *told us* - ahead of time, so we would not be moved from our mission to preach the Gospel, or think that God's prophecies about the future could somehow fail.

God will, by His providence, fulfill prophecy, to the letter. Do not be moved.

In fact, let nothing move you from vibrant faith in Jesus Christ. It's probably not something happening in the world, but rather something in your world, that is seeking to deceive or distract you - to get you to take a disastrous detour.

God is faithful Who has saved you, and promised you a future and a hope.

#2 Don't Let The Construction Of The Third Temple Overtake You

(v14-37)

Just when it might have been starting to sink in that the Temple was going to be destroyed... Jesus started talking about a future event that must take place **in the Temple**.

Mar 13:14 "So when you see the 'ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it ought not" (let the reader understand)...

The passage Jesus was quoting, from the Book of Daniel, describes something despicable occurring that will (and I quote) "bring to an end sacrifice and offering." Since "sacrifice and offering" can only occur in the Temple, then both Daniel and Jesus were predicting a third Temple would be built.

Here is a quick summary: Daniel saw seventy periods of seven years, or 490 years, of God's prophetic dealings with the nation of Israel. This period of 490 years began with the decree of King Artaxerxes in 445BC permitting the Jews to return to and rebuild Jerusalem. Four hundred eighty-three years later, Jesus came to Jerusalem and gave His life for sinners. That leaves a period of seven prophetic years unfulfilled.

According to Daniel 9:27, a future world leader will sign a covenant of peace with Israel, allowing them to rebuild their Temple and reinstitute Temple worship and sacrifice. But after three and one half years this leader will break his covenant of peace with the Jews. He will bring about an end to their sacrifices and their offerings. He will commit the "abomination of desolation" by entering the Temple and proclaiming himself as God, and by demanding to be worshipped as God. This man is the man we call the Antichrist. The Book of the Revelation calls him "the Beast."

This abomination of desolation will usher in the last half of the seven year Great Tribulation.

Jesus jumped ahead to that event, and in verses fourteen through twenty-seven, He is looking beyond the church age in which we live, and is describing the the final three-and-one-half years of the Great Tribulation, that culminate with His physical return to earth.

Mar 13:14 "So when you see the 'ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it ought not" (let the reader understand), "then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.

Mar 13:15 Let him who is on the housetop not go down into the house, nor enter to take anything out of his house.

Mar 13:16 And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes.

Mar 13:17 But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days!

Mar 13:18 And pray that your flight may not be in winter.

Mar 13:19 For in those days there will be tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the creation which God created until this time, nor ever shall be.

Mar 13:20 And unless the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake, whom He chose, He shortened the days.

Mar 13:21 "Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'Look, He is there!' do not believe it.

Mar 13:22 For false christs and false prophets will rise and show signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.

Mar 13:23 But take heed; see, I have told you all things beforehand.

These are very specific instructions to Jews alive when the antichrist makes his move. There will follow a time of unprecedented, global trouble.

The "elect" of the Great Tribulation are Jews who come to faith in Jesus. It is a promise that God will not forget the nation of Israel.

It's interesting that so many Christian theologies **do** forget Israel. They teach that the church IS Israel, and that there is no further plan for Jews. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Those years of Tribulation are described in greater detail in the Revelation of Jesus Christ, from chapters six through eighteen.

Mar 13:24 "But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light;

Mar 13:25 the stars of heaven will fall, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

Mar 13:26 Then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory.

Mar 13:27 And then He will send His angels, and gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest part of earth to the farthest part of heaven.

This is the Second Coming of Jesus. He will return to the earth, and THAT is when He will establish and rule over the Kingdom of God.

Jesus was saying, "Guys, it's all right; God is in charge. The Kingdom promises will not, and cannot, fail. But it won't be now, in this Temple; it will be later, after the desecration of a third Temple."

Mar 13:28 "Now learn this parable from the fig tree..."

Stop there for a moment. We immediately think that "the fig tree" represents Israel. It usually does; but in this case the Gospel of Luke gives us critical additional information. Luke said,

Luk 21:29 Then He spoke to them a parable: "Look at the fig tree, **and all the trees.**

By including "all the trees," Luke was letting us know that Jesus was using the life cycle of trees, in general, rather than saying something limited to Israel.

Mar 13:28 "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.

Mar 13:29 So you also, when you see these things happening, know that it is near - at the doors!

Just like you can predict "summer is near" by looking at a tree, you can predict that Jesus' Second Coming is near when you see the abomination of desolation.

Mar 13:30 Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.

Mar 13:31 Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.

The "generation" alive during the future Great Tribulation will see all those things take place. Once it begins, it cannot be stopped. Everything God has promised and prophesied will come to pass.

We're skipping a detailed description of the Great Tribulation because these verses are not about that. They are about strengthening the hearts of believers who find themselves in that terrible future troubled time. They are Jesus' promise that the world will end just as He said it would; and that they can yet be saved at His Second Coming.

Mar 13:32 "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

How can Jesus not know? As God, Jesus was and is omniscient. But as man, He lived in submission to His Heavenly Father.

More to the point: People alive when the antichrist is on the scene will be able to "know" approximately when Jesus will return. It will be three-and-one-half years after the abomination in the Temple.

Talking to the twelve then, and to us now, "no one knows" because the Tribulation hasn't started. It is therefore impossible to predict the Lord's Second Coming.

Jesus ended with the Parable of the Absent Householder. It is peculiar to Mark and is a final call to watchfulness.

Pastor and author Warren Wiersbe says, "The Parable of the Fig Tree cautions Tribulation saints to watch and know the 'signs of the times.' **But the Parable of the Householder warns all of us today.**"

Mar 13:33 Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is.

Mar 13:34 It is like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch.

Mar 13:35 Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming - in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning -

Mar 13:36 lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping.

Mar 13:37 And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!"

This is a word for *every* believer, in *every* country, through *every* century, while the Lord is in Heaven. It portrays Him coming back at any moment. Thus it seems to be a different coming than His Second Coming.

It reminds us of His promise that, before the Tribulation, **He will return for His church** - to resurrect the dead in Christ, and to rapture those that are alive at that moment.

The apostle Paul said something that fits with Jesus' warning:

1Th 5:4 But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief.

1Th 5:5 You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness.

1Th 5:6 Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober.

The "Day" Paul was referring to is the seven-year Tribulation. It's like a "thief" coming upon the world to rob and destroy. It won't "overtake" us, because we are in the "light" as believers.

Knowing that the Lord's coming for His church is imminent, we ought to be watchful, and ready, and we do that by exercising the "authority" Jesus has given us as His "servants," "to each [our] work."

I issue a stern warning to those who are not saved: **Don't let the construction of the third Temple overtake you!** Come to the Lord before you find yourself witnessing the events Jesus has described. You DO NOT want to be on the earth for any part of the Tribulation.

If you are saved, the construction of the third Temple will not overtake you. You will be removed at the rapture prior to any of the events of the seven-year Tribulation.

But you are still subject to forces that want to see you stray from the path of following Jesus. In addition to deceptions and distractions, there is an inherent laziness we must overcome as we wait for Jesus' coming.

Sure, His coming is imminent - meaning at any moment. But it seems that every moment He doesn't come can make us less watchful, rather than more watchful, if we are not careful and deliberate.

In movies, the guards always fall asleep, because they don't believe there is imminent danger.

I don't want to fall asleep in my chair every night by 8:30pm. I don't think I'm going to... And even when I'm asleep, and wake up, I deny I've dozed off.

I can counter-act my dozing off, but I have to do something, or else the sandman overtakes me. Every night.

Ask yourself: "What am I doing to stay awake and serve the Lord?"