

The Gospel of Mark – The End of Things

Mk. 13:1-37

(Expanded Sermon Notes)



Chapter 13 in Mark's Gospel might be the most challenging chapter in the whole book. Jesus seems to talk in riddles and makes predictions that even the original readers weren't quite sure of what to make of it all. But, if we allow ourselves to step into the scene and the moment, we will come to see that Jesus is making an important statement. He isn't merely giving a prediction of events to come, but he is orienting us to the normal posture of a person who desires to follow God in the world we live in. And he is reminding us of a key truth, he is coming back. Here is how one scholar explains it, "For every reference to the first coming of Jesus in the Bible, there are eight references to his second coming. Why? Because it is essential for living the life of faith. No matter how hard it is now, we press on through trials because it's worth it. Jesus will come again and gather us to himself. We may be uncertain about what is going on around us. But we can be at peace. Certainty about what is ultimate can vanquish confusion about what is immediate. And then we can press on in obedience and faith."¹

Things were about to get harder for the disciples, but they didn't know it yet. Jesus had just defeated all of his challengers in the day of questions at the Temple. The energy and expectation must have been electric for the disciples. Here they were with Jesus in Jerusalem, Sunday's crowds were still fresh in their minds, the days events and Jesus' wise and brilliant words ringing in their ears, now they sit on the Mount of Olives and look back over Jerusalem... what a sight! The question of anticipation and expectation floods their minds, "When will he claim the authority that is his and reign supreme over all those majestic buildings represent?" The conversation that unfolds for Peter, James, and John is not what they were expecting. Instead of glory, Jesus talks of destruction. Instead of reigning now, Jesus talks about returning. Instead of prosperity, Jesus talks about hardship. But Jesus is trying to help them be prepared for what is to come. It is better and harder than they could imagine. And if they grow complacent, they will miss it all. **The truth we will see today is that complacency is a thief, but expectation motivates faithfulness.**

¹ Jason Meyer, *Mark for You*, ed. Carl Laferton, God's Word for You (The Good Book Company, 2022), 197.

1. A matter of time – Past, Present, Future

a. Two key realities:

- i. The age we live in now is finite.
 1. That is this age will come to an end when Jesus returns. Which is actually good news for us. It means that this age of evil and violence will not go on forever. Evil will end, and goodness will reign supreme in the age to come.
- ii. The age to come is infinite.
 1. This means that it is infinite for all. And while this is difficult to get our heads and even hearts around completely, it is a reality that should shape us in the here and now.
 2. Note: This is a particularly difficult passage with lots in it that scholars have debated for centuries. We are not going to solve it all this morning.
 3. “This is why the most common position is to read this passage as a mix of both historical events and eschatological imagery. The main idea of this view is that history consists of repeating cycles and patterns. Judgments in history foreshadow and prefigure a climactic final upheaval and judgment. The destruction of the temple in AD 70 is therefore inextricably linked to the final judgment at the second coming and the destruction of the world as we know it. Some of what Jesus says refers to one event; some refers to the other; some refers to both.”²

iii. A key question: Which age are we living for?

1. If I know that this age is not forever, am I living as if it is all that there is? Or am I living as if this age is preparing me for the age to come? How does this reframe our expectations of ourselves, others, and systems and structures?

b. Three key phrases in this section.

- i. “Be on guard...” (x2) – vv. 9 & 23
- ii. “The one who endures to the end...” – v. 13
 1. **This is not a statement on the process of salvation, but a call to faithful endurance and not giving up on the joy of the kingdom due to hardship in this age.**
- iii. “Stay awake...” – v.37
 1. These phrases all point us to the reality of active anticipation and awareness.
 - a. **This admonition, as well as the concluding admonitions in the chapter to “watch” (vv. 33–37), indicates that the purpose of the eschatological discourse in Mark 13 is not primarily to provide a timetable or blueprint for the future so much as to exhort readers to faithful discipleship in the present.**³
 2. They are oriented at not be caught “off-guard.” – We must remember that our salvation is a gift of grace not works. Jesus’ calls to faithful endurance does not teach the opposite of that. **Instead, it helps us to be reminded that we are saved from sin and for righteousness.**

² Jason Meyer, *Mark for You*, ed. Carl Laferton, God’s Word for You (The Good Book Company, 2022), 207.

³ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 384.

3. This is where the sense of time in this passage helps us. It roots us to faithfulness because we are reminded of what God has done, we look for God in our present, and we anticipate or expect God to move in the future.
 - a. This sense of time reminds us of what we've been saved from and creates expectation for what we are saved for.
- iv. We live in these three states at all times.
 1. **Past** – What we are **actively** remembering.
 2. **Present** – What we are **actively** experiencing.
 3. **Future** – What we are **actively** anticipating.
- v. The Bible routinely encourages this perspective.
 1. **The here-and-now is immediate but not ultimate.** When you set your hope on the immediate, you set yourself up for failure and disappointment. You experience either a false sense of security or a false sense of despair because you are not resting your hope on the ultimate, just the immediate.⁴
 2. **How does this idea of “immediate but not ultimate” help us to live non-anxious lives?**
 - a. If we are living for the age to come, we are able to meet the here and now with a reduced anxiety. That is not a cavalier “nothing matters,” but a grounding to know what truly matters.
 - b. It positions us to live in expectancy.

2. Living in constant expectancy.

- a. Joyful or Begrudging or Fearful Anticipation?
 - i. “Our blessed hope.”
 1. It is our blessed hope because it reminds us that God will not let evil go on unjudged or without consequence. Yes, there is justice (in part) on this side of heaven, but the return of Christ reminds us that there is a time coming when there will be no sin, pain, sickness, partiality, or weeping. For this reason it is our blessed hope.
- b. **Jesus is confronting the ease in which we become complacent. – Ref. Matt. 25:14-30**
 - i. **The parable of the talents is a call to faithfulness and a warning against unfaithfulness.**⁵
 1. “We do not have to shrink at his coming...” – I Jn. 2:28
 2. “Lord when did we do these things?” – Matt. 25:37ff
 - ii. We have four figures in the parable.
 1. The master / business owner.
 2. Three servants / employees.
 - a. Two that were faithful.
 - b. One that was fearful and unfaithful. → **He was complacent.**
 - iii. **The power of this parable is in the contrast between the faithful servants and the unfaithful one.**
 1. Faithful servants – They know their master’s desires and the mission he gave them with the talents.
 - a. This man was obviously a man of means, and he wanted to have his money used profitably while he was away. **He summoned *his own servants* and**

⁴ Jason Meyer, *Mark for You*, ed. Carl Laferton, God’s Word for You (The Good Book Company, 2022), 198.

⁵ Klyne Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus*, Second Edition. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 533.

passed over to them the money he wanted them to invest while he was away.⁶

2. What is a talent?
 - a. A unit of measurement specifically relating to weight.
 - b. **Depending on the metal in question, the value of a talent was equivalent to 6000 days' wages for a day laborer (roughly twenty years' work),** so the man given five talents was given an enormous sum. Obviously the "one talent" man still had an enormous amount.⁷
3. Unfaithful servant – His priority was not the mission of his master but his own safety.
 - a. **The important thing for this man was that the money was secure and that he could produce it when the time came. Keeping it in this way meant that there was no possibility of loss, but it also meant that there was no possibility of gain.**⁸
 - b. He refers to his master as a "hard or harsh" man.
 - i. This doesn't mean that the master was evil or greedy.
 - ii. It does mean that he was a wise and shrewd businessman.⁹
 1. Have you ever met someone who was just good at making money? → That was this guy.
 2. The servant was resentful and even condescending to his master.

c. Complacency ≠ Contentment

- i. We can easily confuse contentment with complacency.
 1. **Complacency** – a feeling of smug or uncritical satisfaction
 - a. I know it could be better, but I just don't care enough to do anything about it.
 - b. Often is a position of resignation.
 - i. "C'est la vie" – That is life.
 - ii. It is just inevitable. → There is nothing I could have done to change it.
 2. **Contentment** – a state of satisfaction
 - a. Example:
 - b. Often involves a conscious choice. → it is an active process to guard your heart and count your blessings.
 - c. Contentment lacks – jealousy / resists comparison
- ii. **Complacency always robs us of blessings.**
 1. Why? → Because complacency centers my hardship or lack and tells me I am absolved of any responsibility.
 2. What blessings?
 - a. **Caution** – Not necessarily material blessings.
 - b. In this parable, the complacent servant was robbed of the joy of his master.

⁶ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 626–627.

⁷ Klyne Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus*, Second Edition. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 528.

⁸ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 628.

⁹ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 630.

- c. It robs us of the blessing of partnership.
- d. It robs us of the blessing of intimacy.
- e. It robs us of the blessing of confidence.
 - i. **Cf. v. 23-²³ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’**

3. Motivation for Godly living & Energetic Mission

- a. Common Good → Uncommon News (the gospel)
 - i. **The parable of the talents ends with those who had used their talents well by being praised and given the opportunity for wider work while the one who refused to use his talent was consigned to the outer darkness with its wailing and gnashing of teeth.** Jesus goes on from there to give a fuller picture of our responsibility, a picture of Judgment Day. He looks to the time *when the Son of man comes in his glory*, a thought that has been with us in one way or another throughout this whole discourse. Jesus’ whole earthly life had been one of lowliness and service; now he looks forward to a coming that will be strikingly different. **He does not define *in his glory*, but clearly he means that when he returns at the end of this age he will come in majesty and splendor.**¹⁰
 - ii. **This section reinforces the truth that was just revealed in the parables.**
 - 1. **It is worth reflecting that this is Jesus’ last teaching to his disciples in this Gospel; Matthew proceeds from this to the story of the passion.** He leaves with his followers the teaching that in daily life the way they treat the lowly, the needy, and the unimportant is of the greatest significance. Not for them is it to flatter the great and to seek to ingratiate themselves with the wealthy and the powerful in this world. They will serve their Master when they serve “the least of these.”¹¹
 - iii. **Another way of saying this is: The way we live matters in the scope of eternity...** (Past, Present, and Future) “What are we known for?”
 - 1. **This is very much to future forward action of the transformational power of the gospel in our lives.**
- b. God has given every person talents / resources to steward.
 - i. **Once again Jesus is teaching that the reward for good work is the opportunity of doing further work. “Enter the joy of your master” may be understood in the sense of *REB*, “share your master’s joy.”** Whether that is the way to take it or not, it clearly means that the servant has received the warm approval of his master and that his future is one in which joy will be prominent.¹²
 - 1. **Caution:** The actual size of their gain was not as important as the fact that each had doubled the amount entrusted to him.¹³
 - ii. **“How are my investments doing?”** – This is one of our life questions.
 - 1. **A disciple is someone who...**

¹⁰ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 635.

¹¹ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 641.

¹² Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 629.

¹³ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 630.

- a. Character: Focuses on eternity
 - b. Competency: Freely gives
 - 2. This question again points to the known reality that mission is not a passive pursuit.
→ We must be intentional.
- c. What are we called to be faithful with?
 - i. **The gospel** – The good news of abundant and eternal life through Jesus.
 - 1. The Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20)
 - a. ¹⁸ **And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”**
 - b. **This is the greatest news that we could ever share.** → God loves you so much that he made a way to reconcile you to himself even though you caused the rift to begin with.
 - ii. **Time** – We all have the same amount of time available to us.
 - 1. 24 hours per day → 8760 hours per year.
 - 2. How are we spending that resource? How are we investing it? Who are we investing it into?
 - iii. **Talents** – In this parable, Jesus refers to a measurement of money called a talent.
 - 1. We can think of talents as physical and spiritual giftings.
 - a. What talents (natural abilities and spiritual giftings) has God given to you?
 - b. Don't know?
 - i. Ask someone else.
 - ii. Take a spiritual gifts inventory.
 - 2. Are you using your gifts to serve yourself or the kingdom?
 - iv. **Treasure** – These are our monetary resources.
 - 1. **I have heard it said this way, there is no greater indicator of the health of my spiritual life than my bank account.**
 - 2. The simple reality is that we are willing to spend on what we think is important.
 - a. Caution – Your giving is to be done with a pure heart and out of a deep sense of God's generosity towards you. → God does not need your money.
 - b. Our giving is to always be done out of a posture of worship. That is, a posture of praise for God's faithful provision and love.
- d. **Where are we called to be faithful with these things?**
 - i. Remember – Faithfulness implies there is something to be faithful to. And, if there is something to be faithful to, we must not grow complacent, or we will miss the mission.
 - ii. We need to consider the gospel, our time, talents, and treasure in...
 - 1. **Our families**
 - a. What is the main priority of our family? (Ask your kids.)
 - 2. **Our neighborhoods**
 - a. What talents do I have that can bless my neighbors?
 - 3. **Our workplaces / schools**
 - a. What is my motivation for work?
 - 4. **Our casual interactions**
 - a. What first-impression do I give?
 - iii. **How can I be about my Father's business in each of these areas?**
 - iv. We must resist the simple answer of just being good people.

1. God wants so much more for us than just some cold morality.
 2. He wants for us to experience hope, peace, joy, contentment, and his presence everyday. → Yes, our moral obedience is part of that, but there is so much more than just “keeping the rules.”
- v. **Maybe we need to ask, what is at risk of being robbed from us if we grow complacent in each of these areas?**

Additional Notes:

On the future - The attempt to penetrate the future has always been a fascination to people. Some resort to spirit mediums, others to astrology, still others to traditional but unsupported religious interpretations—all of which the Scripture roundly condemns. In our generation of readily available knowledge, there is an entire industry built on predicting the future. Experts in this discipline usually proceed by analyzing the trends of the past few years and then projecting them forward. Despite the immense efforts that go into such work, however, predictions of this sort are always predicated on the assumption that the present trends will continue. If they do not, the predictions prove seriously faulty.¹⁴

Son of Man - According to the Gospels, “Son of Man” is Jesus’ favorite self-designation. It is used eighty-six times in the NT (Synoptics 69x, John 13x, elsewhere 4x). In the NT it is never presented as a confessional term from someone in the early church. However, Jesus does use it alongside confessional titles, such as “Messiah,” that others raise (e.g., Mk 8:29–31; 14:61–62). The phrase in its various lexical constructions is almost exclusively confined to the Gospels, except at Acts 7:56; Hebrews 2:6 (where Ps 8:4 is cited); Revelation 1:13; 14:14. In the Gospels only Jesus uses the term, except at John 12:34, where what he has said is cited by others. The term is written in Greek as “the son of the man” (*ho huios tou anthrōpou*), except for John 5:27; Hebrews 2:6; Revelation 1:13; 14:14 (*huios anthrōpou*). The phrase in a few Gospel passages (Mt 24:30 // Mk 13:26 // Lk 21:27; Mt 26:64 // Mk 14:62 // Lk 22:69) is related directly to language from Daniel 7:13–14 and, as was noted above, is associated in Hebrews 2:6 with Psalm 8, where it carries its common meaning of “human being,” as a “son of man” is a descendant of a man and thus a human.¹⁵

The consistency of the term’s use only by Jesus and the lack of its use as a confessional term of the early church elsewhere in the NT makes it extremely unlikely to have been the creation of the church.¹⁶

On The Abomination and the Tribulation:

There are three main ways to read **verses 14–23**:

1. The historical view: Jesus is solely referring to AD 70, when the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed.
2. The eschatological view: Jesus is solely referring to the end of the age and the second coming.

¹⁴ D. A. Carson, *God with Us: Themes from Matthew* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 139.

¹⁵ D. L. Bock, “Son of Man,” ed. Joel B. Green, Jeannine K. Brown, and Nicholas Perrin, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels, Second Edition* (Downers Grove, IL; Nottingham, England: IVP Academic; IVP, 2013), 894.

¹⁶ D. L. Bock, “Son of Man,” ed. Joel B. Green, Jeannine K. Brown, and Nicholas Perrin, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels, Second Edition* (Downers Grove, IL; Nottingham, England: IVP Academic; IVP, 2013), 897.

3. The combination view: Jesus is referring to both these timeframes.

The phrase “abomination of desolation” originates from the book of Daniel (9:27; 11:31; 12:11). An abomination here is a sacrilege—a serious violation of God’s law or a desecration of something holy. Most students of the Bible read Daniel’s prophecy as a prediction of the desecration of the temple by a ruler named Antiochus Epiphanes (167 BC). The Jewish historian Josephus documented the sacrilege committed by Antiochus; he built a pagan altar on God’s altar and sacrificed a pig on it (*Antiquities of the Jews*, 12.5.4). This was an “abomination ... standing where he ought not to be” (Mark **13:14**). Using this phrase would have had a profound and startling effect on any Jew. It would make them think of Antiochus’ sacrilege and make them wonder, *Could such sacrilege happen again?*

How should we read these verses? Let’s see the case for each of the first two interpretations, detail by detail.

The Abomination

Jesus describes a desolating sacrilege involving something “standing where he ought not to be” (v **14**). In the original Greek, Mark uses a masculine form of the word for “standing.” One would expect a neuter form of the word (i.e. standing where *it* ought not to be) because that would grammatically agree with the neuter word “abomination.” The masculine form suggests that Jesus envisions a person and not just an event or thing.

The historical view says that the desolating sacrilege refers in some way to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in AD 70. It could be the moment when the Roman general Titus entered into the temple sanctuary, or when the Roman soldiers set their standards up in the temple and offered sacrifices while acclaiming Titus as emperor. Another strong possibility would be the actions of the Jewish Zealots and others who, in AD 67–68, made themselves priests and were thus standing where they should not be.

The eschatological view, meanwhile, says that Jesus is talking about an antichrist figure, probably the same person as Paul’s “man of lawlessness,” who will come shortly before the return of Jesus (2 Thessalonians 2:1–10; see also “antichrist” in 1 John 2:18 and the “beast” in Revelation 11:7; 13:1–18). Paul says the “man of lawlessness” will be where he ought not to be: “he takes his seat in the temple of God” and claims what he should not claim, “proclaiming himself to be God” (2 Thessalonians 2:4).¹⁷

The Elect

Jesus adds that God has “cut short the days” of the tribulation for the sake of “the elect, whom he chose” (v **20**). In the historical view, the “elect” or “chosen people” is the small number of Jewish Christians that were still in Jerusalem during the siege. The idea that God “cut short the days” is a reference to the siege lasting five months, which, though horrible, was a relatively short timeframe for a siege. In the eschatological view, the elect would be all Christians living during this future tribulation. Remember that Jesus has already commented on the worldwide spread of the gospel (v **10**). The elect are all those around the world whom God has chosen (see Ephesians 1:4).¹⁸

¹⁷ Jason Meyer, *Mark for You*, ed. Carl Laferton, God’s Word for You (The Good Book Company, 2022), 200–201.

¹⁸ Jason Meyer, *Mark for You*, ed. Carl Laferton, God’s Word for You (The Good Book Company, 2022), 203.