

# Living in the Reality of Jesus' Reign

Mark 13:24-37

*Halifax & Glenholme: 13 September 2020*

## **Introduction:**

For the last couple of weeks, we have been looking at Mark 13.

- In this chapter, we have Mark's account of the Olivet Discourse where Jesus speaks to His disciples about the coming destruction of the temple at Jerusalem.
  - Some expositors have said that this is the most difficult chapter in Mark.
  - Handling predictive prophecy is always challenging and leads to a variety of different opinions about how things ought to be interpreted.
    - But we need not despair.
    - We can be thankful for what our Confession says about difficult passages.
      - In chapter 1, paragraph 7, it says: **All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all: yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation are so clearly propounded, and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them.**
- And for me with preaching a difficult text of prophecy like this, there are also several encouragements.
  - First, that very often with such passages, the main purpose is not so much to inform about what is going to happen in the future, but rather to instruct us about how to live in the face of similar events, and to inform us about the kinds of things that may happen to us.
    - For example, I might preach through the prophecies that tell of judgment on different nations that have already been destroyed. My preaching would warn about judgement that will come to us if we do similar things.
    - Therefore, if I am mistaken about whether Jesus is talking about getting ready for the fall of Jerusalem or about the final judgment, the application for us will still be about preparing for judgment.
  - Second, as with all difficult passages, as long as I do not depart from what is clearly expressed in other parts of the Bible and speak what is true to the analogy of faith, I am still proclaiming God's word even if I might be mistaken about some of the particular matters that the prophecy refers to.
    - To use the same illustration, if I say that this text applies to fall of Jerusalem where in fact it is speaking about the end of the world, the fact is that scripture testifies to both events and though I got the passage wrong, I still proclaimed events that were foretold by the Lord.
- As a listener, you can apply this as well.
  - If you don't agree with a preacher's eschatology (doctrine of last things), you can still be edified from the sermon—and should seek to be edified.
  - If he is telling you about God's gathering of His people and you think it is the final gathering but he thinks it is their gathering by the gospel,

- You can still rejoice that God does gather His people in both ways and you can praise the Lord and trust Him and give thanks—and make sure that you are among those who either have been gathered or will be gathered as the case may be.

With that in mind, let me now read the entire passage to you and then give you an overview summary of the entire passage.

- After that, we will look at our particular text for this week which is Mark 13:24-37.
- Here is the word of God, beginning in Mark 13:1:

**Mark 13:1-37:** 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!*”<sup>2</sup> 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.”<sup>3</sup> Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked Him privately,<sup>4</sup> “Tell us, when will these things be? And what *will be* the sign when all these things will be fulfilled?”<sup>5</sup> And Jesus, answering them, began to say: “Take heed that no one deceives you.<sup>6</sup> For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am *He,*’ and will deceive many.<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup> For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be earthquakes in various places, and there will be famines and troubles. These *are* the beginnings of sorrows.<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup> And the gospel must first be preached to all the nations.<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup> 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.<sup>13</sup> And you

will be hated by all for My name’s sake. But he who endures to the end shall be saved.<sup>14</sup> 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.<sup>15</sup> Let him who is on the housetop not go down into the house, nor enter to take anything out of his house.<sup>16</sup> And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes.<sup>17</sup> But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days!<sup>18</sup> And pray that your flight may not be in winter.<sup>19</sup> 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.<sup>20</sup> 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.<sup>21</sup> Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here *is* the Christ!’ or, ‘Look, *He is* there!’ do not believe it.<sup>22</sup> For false christs and false prophets will rise and show signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.<sup>23</sup> But take heed; see, I have told you all things beforehand.<sup>24</sup> But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light;<sup>25</sup> the stars of heaven will fall, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.<sup>26</sup> Then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory.<sup>27</sup> 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.<sup>28</sup> 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. <sup>29</sup> So you also, when you see these things happening, know that it is near—at the doors! <sup>30</sup> Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. <sup>31</sup> Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away. <sup>32</sup> But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. <sup>33</sup> Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not

know when the time is. <sup>34</sup> *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. <sup>35</sup> 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— <sup>36</sup> lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. <sup>37</sup> And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!”

May the Lord bless His Word.

Summary of the whole discourse:

- The passage begins with a disciple pointing out the magnificence of the great temple at Jerusalem and Jesus responding that not one stone will be left upon another.
- This prompts four of His disciples to ask Him when this going to happen and what the sign of it will be—in their minds, the temple was to stand until the end of the world, so for them the fall of the temple will also be the last day—the day of LORD, the day of judgment and resurrection.
- Jesus begins His answer in verse 5-3 by telling them that there will be all kinds of troubles in the world as well as persecutions of those who follow Him, but that these are not signs of the end. In verse 7, He says that such things will happen but that the end is not yet. He warns them about those who will say that it is the end and He stresses that instead of looking to escape these things, they should look for grace to endure these things to end.
- Then in verse 14-23, which we looked at last week, He tells them what the sign of the destruction of the temple will be—the sign given by Daniel—that there will an abomination of desolation set up there.
  - He tells them that as soon as they see this, they should flee from Judea to the mountains because it is the harbinger of the worst tribulation ever in connection with the fall of Jerusalem.
  - To those who are chosen for salvation, He gives warnings that they must not be deceived, and promises that they will not be deceived.
- And then we have the part we are looking at this week, from verse 24 to the end.
  - First, in verses 24-27, Jesus tells of a monumental change in the cosmos after the terrible tribulation of which He has just spoken...
  - Second, in verses 28-31, He warns that this tribulation is to come within the present generation—they need to be sure that they do not miss the signs...
  - And lastly, in verse 32-37, He calls for all of His people in all times to live in anticipation of the last day which will come without any particular signs.

Of course, we will look at today's text as it pertains to us as His disciples today.

- So let's embark.

## I. See how Jesus tells us of a monumental change in the cosmos.

A. This change is described by Jesus in verses 24-27 as a change in how the elect people of God are gathered to God for His salvation.

1. Before Jesus came, those chosen for salvation were gathered to God at the temple in Jerusalem.

- At the temple, He revealed through its rituals that His chosen people are saved by sacrifices for sin and offerings for righteousness.
- It was a strong testimony from God that we cannot approach Him because of our sin and defilement unless He cleanses us.
- But Jesus has told of the destruction of the temple such that no stone will be left upon another.
- Where will the elect then be gathered together to God?

2. Jesus says that the elect will be gathered to Him when He is in the clouds!

- There will be a great change in two ways: that they will be gathered to Him instead of to the temple at Jerusalem, and that they will be gathered from all the nations, no longer only from Israel.
- This is described in verse 26-27.
- It says: **“Then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. <sup>27</sup> 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.”**

a. You see how it speaks of their being gathered from all over the earth, exactly what began to happen in a very significant way once Jesus came.

- This had never happened before—the nations had only shown minimal interest in the Lord—and when they did turn to Him, they had to be circumcised and become part of Israel—they had to become worshippers at the temple in Jerusalem.
- After Jesus came and the temple was destroyed, they worshipped Him wherever Jesus was preached as Lord and Saviour and His sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper were administered.
- The great assembly now gathered in many places all over the world had their unity was in the gospel—the word and sacraments—which they received by faith.

b. But what is this bit about “the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory?”

1) That is a fulfillment of the prophecy of Daniel that we read in Daniel 7, written of Jesus over five centuries before Jesus came.

- In Daniel 7:13-14, Daniel said: **“I was watching in the night visions, and behold, *One* like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. <sup>14</sup> Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an**

**everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed.”**

- Daniel’s vision sees Christ coming in the clouds from heaven’s side of things—coming up in the clouds to His throne to rule the nations.
  - Jesus describes the same event from earth’s perspective where they also see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with power and glory...
- 2) His reign is seen in two monumental ways from earth.
  - First, it is seen in the destruction of the temple at Jerusalem. Jesus as Lord has denounced them and visits them with destruction by the hand of the Roman armies—just as He prophesies here.
  - Second, it is seen by Him gathering the elect from all peoples, nations, and languages to serve Him.
    - Think of what an amazing prophecy this was!
      - If there was any other prophecy like this in any other religion (besides the true one that men hate), the world would be so impressed!
    - That five hundred years before He came, recorded in the Old Testament, it was told that He would come to this throne in the clouds before the Father and that people from all nations would serve Him.
      - And Jesus repeated this prophecy when He was about to go to the cross to be crucified... when He was scarcely known among the nations... when He was being rejected by His own people, and when He had only a few confused and fearful disciples who were not men of any status or particular ability.
- 3) Perhaps I should mention that this whole idea of coming in the clouds was a familiar one that was perfectly understood by the Jews...
  - not of God coming to earth, but of Him coming to judge His enemies and to act in behalf of His people... it spoke of an exhibition of God’s power.
  - a) When Jesus was at His trial, which we will soon see in Mark 14:61-62, the high priest asked Him, **“Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?”** And when Jesus said (v. 62) **“I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.”**
    - that’s when the priest tore his clothes and accused Him of blasphemy—
  - b) It was understood that the one who came with glory in the clouds was God coming to judge.
    - They had the LORD go before them in the pillar of cloud in the wilderness, and the glory cloud filled the tabernacle and the temple when it was dedicated to show that God was there.
    - Psalm 68:4 says: **Sing to God, sing praises to His name; extol Him who rides on the clouds, by His name YAH, and rejoice before Him.**

- Psalm 104:3 speaks of Him as the One who: **lays the beams of His upper chambers in the waters, Who makes the clouds His chariot, Who walks on the wings of the wind.**
- In Isaiah 19:1, the LORD is seen coming in the cloud to judge Egypt and their idols: **The burden against Egypt. Behold, the LORD rides on a swift cloud, and will come into Egypt; The idols of Egypt will totter at His presence, and the heart of Egypt will melt in its midst.**

TRANS> So the change here described by Jesus is the change that occurred on earth when instead of God's elect being gathered to Him at the temple in Jerusalem,

- they were instead gathered from all nations to the Son of Man who was in the clouds at the Father's right hand.
- As He said, His sheep who were not of the fold of Israel, hear His voice and come to Him and He saves and keeps them and brings them to the Father.
- The change from gathering at the temple to gathering to Christ in churches that He appointed to administer word and sacrament was complete when the temple was destroyed in 70 AD.

B. The language Jesus uses emphasises the greatness of this change.

1. The words He uses in verses 24 and 25 are drawn entirely from the Old Testament descriptions of God's overthrow of the existing order.
  - He says (Mark 13:24-25): **But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; <sup>25</sup> the stars of heaven will fall, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.**
2. Those who are not familiar with the Old Testament hear such language and they think about an actual disruption in the heavens.
  - Certainly such things have happened—for example, the sun was darkened when Jesus died on the cross.
  - But when the Jews heard this, they thought of the overthrow of kingdoms and powers that had long stood.
    - For example, when Isaiah prophesied of the destruction of Babylon, he said: **Isiah 13:10: For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be darkened in its going forth, and the moon will not cause its light to shine.**
    - Or against Egypt, the LORD said: **Ezek 32:7: "When I put out your light, I will cover the heavens, and make its stars dark; I will cover the sun with a cloud, And the moon shall not give her light."**
  - Such language was used to show God's overthrow of dominions and powers.
  - And Jesus uses it to describe the monumental change from the temple as the gathering place of the elect to the Son of Man in the clouds at the Father's right hand of power.

C. Jesus also tells us the timing of this great change.

1. He says in verse 24 that it will be *in those days*.
  - He has just been talking about the days when the temple will be desecrated and then overthrown.

- This makes it clear that the changes He speaks about here are not at some far off time, but that the great change will occur in direct connection to *those days*.
- 2. This is further supported because He adds *after that tribulation...*
  - What tribulation?
    - The tribulation that He just spoke about when the temple and the city of Jerusalem will be destroyed—a tribulation like no other that has ever been.
      - That is exactly how Josephus, the Jewish historian, described it.
    - The word *after* in the phrase *after that tribulation* is ordinarily translated *with*—that this change is something that goes along with that tribulation.
      - It is correct to translate it with the word *after*, but it is not warranted to suggest that it refers to a change that comes in the far off future.
      - It is a change that is brought in with that tribulation when the temple at Jerusalem is destroyed, it is then that Son of Man comes in the clouds and gathers His elect from the nations.
      - It is directly connected with the destruction of the temple.

TRANS> Having announced this earthshattering change that will come...

## II. Jesus then warns His disciples to be sure that they don't miss it!

A. He tells them to take a lesson from the fig tree.

- You can see that in verse 28 & 29.
- 1. It was one of the few trees in the region that lost its leaves and grew them back in the spring—the way so many of our trees do.
  - And Jesus says, **“When its branch has already become tender, and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. <sup>29</sup> So you also, when you see these things happening, know that it is near—at the doors!”**
  - Jesus has told them that there will be a desecration of the temple like Daniel spoke about, and that this will be sign of its destruction.
    - When they see that, they are to flee from Jerusalem and from the province of Judea where Jerusalem was located, because that is the time when this cataclysmic destruction is going to fall.
- 2. His point is that these signs ought not to be missed.
  - They knew the signs of summer—let them also know the signs of Jerusalem's coming destruction.
  - He insists that all of which He has spoken will take place before the present generation is out.
    - In verse 30 & 31, he says: **“Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. <sup>31</sup> Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.”**
  - In the Bible as well as in all other literature of the time, the word generation always refers to people who live on the earth at the same time.

- Jesus is insisting that the great change He had spoken of in the order of the cosmos will occur before the people of His generation are gone.
- And indeed, that change occurred in 70 AD.

B. Now you might wonder how anyone could miss something so monumental!

1. That is a good question.
  - It is absurd to miss it.
  - And of course it would be impossible to miss the destruction of the temple, but what they would miss is that this was the doing of Jesus of Nazareth.
    - That is what people miss when God sends judgments in the earth—they do not see that God has done it.
    - Even when it is prophesied beforehand by both long term and short term prophecies, they are oblivious.
  - The temple comes down and Jesus takes His throne and begins to gather His elect into His church from all the nations...
    - But people don't even notice what is happening before their eyes.
    - They don't acknowledge Him as the LORD and Saviour.
    - They don't fear His judgment and they don't come to Him for mercy and salvation that they might be pardoned and reconciled to God.
      - There is the temple in ruins.
      - And there are people coming to be His disciples in all the nations...
        - But people are oblivious to it all.
2. Jesus is telling His disciples to live in the reality of what is happening in the world.
  - The Son of Man is reigning.
    - He is Lord and Saviour and He is to be worshipped and served.
  - How kind He is to urge this upon them and upon all.
    - His call goes out to all the earth, but only those who are elect will hear Him...
3. How can people miss this today?
  - How can anyone read these prophecies and not see that they are divine prophecies?
    - How could Daniel know almost six hundred years beforehand and write it down that the nations would come to Israel's Messiah?
    - How could Jesus have thought they would come to Him when He was being rejected?
  - It is quite unreasonable for anyone to deny that Jesus has been exalted to be Lord and Christ.
    - It is only because of the hardness of men's hearts that they deny it.
    - It is to their own hurt that they deny it.

**III. In the remainder of the discourse, Jesus speaks to His disciples about the end of all things.**



- A. In verse 32, He refers to it as “that day.”
1. Up until now, He has been speaking about “those days” and “these things,” referring to the destruction of the temple which happens over time.
    - His coming with the clouds would be seen over time with the armies coming, the abomination of desolation in the temple, the overthrow of the temple, the gathering of His elect from the nations—it was over many days.
  2. But now in verse 32, He begins to speak of “that day...”
    - a single day, which, unlike the days that they would be able see coming because of the signs and indicators He had told them about...
      - is a day that will come without any signs to warn of its approach.
      - He says (verse 32): **"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."**
    - In scripture, the day He speaks about now is sometimes called “the last day” or “the great day,” or “the day of the Lord” or simply “the day.”
      - It is the Day of Judgment which the Jews knew of.
      - It is also the Day of Resurrection and Restoration for which they hoped.
    - Remember that the Jews thought the destruction of the temple and this day would be same day.
      - At the beginning of His discourse about the destruction of the temple, Jesus told His disciples that they would see destructions of every sort and terrible tribulation, but that these would not be the end or signs of the end.
      - He informed them that the temple would be destroyed, but the last day would not come until the gospel had been preached to all the nations.
        - That only fully began, as we have seen, when the temple was destroyed.
- So what does this mean?
3. It means that after the temple was destroyed, the gathering of the elect from all nations to Christ began in full force.
    - This would go on for some undetermined time—Jesus insisted that nobody, even the angels—yes, even He Himself did not know for how long.
- B. Jesus tells us what to do during this period of Him coming in the clouds with power and glory to gather His elect from the nations.
- There are three things that He graciously tells us to do until that final day comes: watch, pray, and work.
    - Let’s look at these.
1. The word that is stressed most of all here is the word ***watch***.
    - a. There are actually three synonymous words that are used from verse 33 to verse 37...
      - Verse 33 says: “Take heed, watch...” because we do not know when the time is.

- In verse 34, He gives us a parable in which He mentions that the man went on a journey and told the doorkeeper to watch until he returns (this is the third word in the original).
  - And then in verse 35 & 36, He again commands us to watch lest we be found sleeping when our Master comes—because we don't know when that will be.
  - And then He concludes the whole with verse 37 with a universal command to all of us: **“And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!”**
- b. So you see that there is quite an emphasis here on watching. But what does it mean?
- It is literally a call to stay awake. As He says in verse 36, “lest coming suddenly, He [your Master] find you sleeping.”
  - Jesus doesn't mean that we are never to go to bed again.
    - The darkness He is talking about is the darkness of those who do not pay attention to the fact that Jesus is reigning in power and glory!
    - They are sleeping—they are oblivious to the fact that having destroyed the Temple, He has ever since been gathering His elect from all over the world.
    - And God has appointed a Day—a Day of which the date is not known—when He will come to reward His own and to destroy those who have not acknowledged Him.
- c. What greater insult could there be to God and to His Son than for Him to come into the world, die on the cross to atone for His people's sins, to have God exalt Him as Lord and Saviour over all nations, and to ignore Him?
- To ignore His kingdom that is being built all over the world and to dismiss it as unimportant or irrelevant.
  - To go on about your life as if there is no Saviour, no Lord, no kingdom, no God that you need to be reconciled to—
    - to be oblivious to what God is doing and to count it as unimportant and irrelevant.
- d. To watch is to live in the reality of Jesus Christ and His reign.
- It is to live in the reality that He is going to come and judge every one of us at the last day—whenever that day is.
  - It is to live in view of that day—to recognise that nothing else really matters but how we stand on that day.
  - We must ever be watchful—awake to the reality of our Lord—because we do not know when He will come.
2. The second thing Jesus tells us to do is to pray.
- If you are mindful that Jesus is exalted at God's right hand in power and glory to be Saviour and Lord, you will call on Him to save you.

- You will see that you do not want to stand before Him in judgement unless your sins are forgiven—so you will come to Him for forgiveness...
  - And you will see that His purpose is to reconcile you to God—and you will see that you cannot walk with God apart from His grace and help, so you will pray to Him to transform your life—to make you holy—to cause you to grow in knowledge and love and self-control.
  - You will depend on Him to guide you as your Saviour and Lord—
    - You will come to His word prayerfully to learn His will and to learn of His gracious work and promises.
    - In short, you will look to Him as your Saviour to prepare you to meet Him at the last day.
  - And besides that, you will pray for those that you love—that He will prepare them for that day—and that He will awaken those who are asleep that they might wake up and come to Him for salvation.
3. And the third word Jesus uses is the word **work**.
- It is actually used in the parable about the man who goes on a journey and leaves his servants to work for him until he returns.
  - You are to be busy serving your Master Jesus by serving His people—whether it is caring for His children that He has entrusted to you, serving your spouse, serving as an officer in the church, serving the people you work for...
    - You serve Jesus by serving them and caring for them in love—and you are to continue pouring out your life for them until He comes.
    - Don't harden your heart and allow bitterness to grow up in your heart.
      - You have a gracious Saviour who is full of mercy.
      - See that you are like Him.

### **Conclusion:**

So you see that we are to live in the reality that Jesus is reigning at God's right hand and that He will come again at the last day.

- Are you watching?
- Are you living according to reality, or will He find you sleeping?

Hear again His own conclusion:

- **Mark 13:35-37: "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—<sup>36</sup> lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. <sup>37</sup> And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!"**