

Pastoral Applications of Mark 13:1-37

R. Alan Cole, *Mark, Tyndale New Testament Commentary*, p. 278.

The whole of Mark 13 seems designed to warn the disciples against four great spiritual dangers.

- 1) Reliance upon the outward symbols of religion, venerable and loved as they may be (vs 2).
- 2) Deception by false Messiahs (vss 5, 6).
- 3) Distraction by world turmoil around us (vss 7, 8).
- 4) Being 'tripped up' due to the unexpected severity of the persecution for our faith (vss 9 ff.).

To be forewarned, in each case, is to be forearmed: we must *take heed* (verse 5).

Donald English, *The Message of Mark, The Bible Speaks Today (NT)*, pp. 210-211.

a. Realism and hope

This chapter does not hold out great encouragement for 'triumphantistic' or 'prosperity' versions of Christianity. The descriptions chill the spine. We do well to remember that something of this account of Jesus has actually been happening to some Christians in every age. We do not await much of this. Persecution, false teachers, natural disasters are not elements of a future age, they happen now. Any true account of discipleship, and any call to believe, must include these factors as possible parts of the experience. In recent decades these things have been the daily reality for Christians in South Africa, South America and Eastern Europe.

Yet the situation described is not hopeless—quite the opposite. The Christian's calling is to watch and to endure. We are not part of the world of 'quick spiritual fixes' or 'flashy impressive messiahs'. To be on guard and to last out are more impressive testimony to the gospel of Jesus Christ, and more realistic too. There is no escapism here.

b. Like master like disciple

The clue to surviving the difficult days, which will increasingly in Mark's gospel be seen to be the secret of all the life of the disciple, is to follow in the steps of Jesus himself. The way he took for our salvation was death and resurrection. He went the way of the cross. God raised him from the dead. So, we are called to take up our cross and follow day by day, in faith that day-by-day God will raise us to new life in Christ (Rom. 8:9–11). As we die to all to which he died, we shall live to all to which he rose.

c. The present and the eventual

Written into the challenge to watch is the exhortation to perceive the meaning of things. (See 28–29 especially.) Ordinary (and extraordinary) everyday events have an eternal significance, if only we can see it. The relationship of the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 to the Parousia [Second Coming] is a case in point. Jesus is hinting that everything that happens to us is projected on to the screen of eternity. We are becoming what eternally we shall be. Everything has a double point of reference—now and then. We are called to live the now in the light of the then. To live by this perspective is to be truly 'broad-minded'.

Bruce B. Barton, *Mark, Life Application Bible Commentary* [no page numbers given]

Jesus Tells About The Future / 13:1-23

Chapter 13 of Mark has a conversation between Jesus and his disciples as they left the temple and Jerusalem, walking back to Bethany where they spent their nights. Jesus took advantage of this "teachable moment." A casual remark about the magnificent temple by a disciple led Jesus to make a startling prophetic statement about the fate of the temple. The group paused on the Mount of Olives, where they could glance back across the valley toward Jerusalem. Perhaps they watched the sun set behind the ancient city.

Several disciples chose that moment to ask two curious questions: When will these things happen? What will be the sign? With his answers, Jesus prepared his disciples for the difficult years ahead. He warned them about false messiahs, natural disasters, and persecutions. But he also assured them that he would be with them to protect them and make his kingdom known through them. Jesus promised that, in the end, he would return in power and glory to save them. Jesus' warnings and promises to his disciples also apply to us as we look forward to his return:

- We must be ready.
- We must continue to proclaim the gospel.
- We must endure great trials.
- We must wait patiently.

Jesus Tells About His Return / 13:24-31

This section provides Jesus' true answer to the questions his disciples asked in 13:4. But Jesus went well beyond what he had been asked. The original questions focused on the destruction of the temple and the devastation of the nation. In his answer, Jesus predicted the destruction of Jerusalem and his return in full glory without any of the limitations he took on by becoming human. He was not speaking of his immediate resurrection, but his eventual, glorious return.

In the previous paragraphs, Jesus painted a picture of hardship, confusion, and waiting. But when it seems as though things can't possibly get any worse, they will. Heaven and earth will be irreversibly changed. There will be a sunset, but no sunup. That completely dark stage will make the arrival of the Son of Man visible to all.

Jesus Tells About Remaining Watchful / 13:32-37

Probably because Jesus knew that the question about when he would return would be asked most often, he saved his answer to the disciples' question, "When will all this happen?" for last. His answer was blunt: "No one knows; not even me." He then pointed out that the mark of a disciple was not having inside information, but serving Christ faithfully. Spiritual vigilance, "not sleeping," becomes the essential theme of the entire chapter. Jesus' servants must be so busy that they have no time to speculate about his schedule.

So Now What?

The entire thirteenth chapter of Mark tells us how to live while we wait for Christ's return:

- We are not to be misled by confusing claims or speculative interpretations of future events (13:5-6).
- We should not be afraid to tell people about Christ, despite what they might say or do to us (13:9-11).
- We must stand firm by faith and not be surprised by persecution (13:13).
- We must be morally alert, obedient to the commands for living found in God's Word.

This chapter was not given to promote discussions on prophetic timetables, but to stimulate right living for God in a world where he is largely ignored. Jesus' purpose was to warn us to be prepared. Will you be ready? The only safe choice is to obey him *today*.

Examples of Gospel Passages Illustrating Jesus' Functional Omnipotence (*adapted from Copilot*)

1. Jesus Knows People's Thoughts

Matt. 9:4: "Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, 'Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts?'" Jesus directly addresses the unspoken thoughts of the scribes, showing knowledge beyond human perception.

Lk. 6:8: "But Jesus knew what they were thinking and said to the man with the shriveled hand, 'Get up and stand in front of everyone.'" Jesus responds to the Pharisees' silent criticism, revealing His awareness of their internal reasoning.

2. Jesus Predicts Future Events Accurately

Jn. 13:38: "Jesus answered, 'Will you really lay down your life for me? Very truly I tell you, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times!'" Jesus foretells Peter's denial with precise detail.

Matt. 26:21-25: Jesus predicts Judas' betrayal during the Last Supper, identifying him before the act occurs. Shows knowledge of future actions and motives.

Jn. 21:18-19: Jesus tells Peter how he will die, showing foreknowledge of Peter's future.

3. Jesus Knows Personal Details Without Being Told

Jn. 1:47-49: Jesus describes Nathanael's character and location before meeting him.

Jn. 4:16-19, 29: Jesus tells the Samaritan woman details about her life that He could not have known naturally. She says, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did."

4. Jesus' Knowledge of Divine Mysteries and Hidden Things

Matt. 11:27: "All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." Indicates unique, comprehensive knowledge of God's nature.

Jn. 16:30: The disciples say, "Now we know that you know all things and do not need anyone to question you. This makes us believe that you came from God."

5. Jesus Knows the Hearts and Faith of Individuals

Mk. 2:8: "Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts..."

Jn. 2:24-25: "But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all people. He did not need any testimony about mankind, for he knew what was in each person."