

If you'd like to get your bibles and turn with me to Mark 13 that would be great – 3 good reasons why it would be helpful to have your bibles open

1. Always good to do that when listening to God's Word so you can check the truth of what you are hearing
2. Especially today because I am a visiting speaker so who knows if what I'm going to be saying is going to be faithful to God's Word so especially important to check it
3. Because the passage we are looking at – Mark 13 is not the most straightforward passage – bible believing Christians offer different ways of interpreting it and the way I'm going to interpret some of it at least is probably not the most common way of understanding it – so you really do need to check it out!

SO Mark 13

(Josh – this bit was added in spur of the moment by me – so this is a rough guess at what I said:

A little while ago my son and I did the stadium tour at Anfield just after the new stand had been built – amazing stand, and we saw the Kop and the museum tour etc – imagine if afterwards someone came up to us and said – did you enjoy the tour? – Yes wonderful stadium – and then he said – I'm telling you in your lifetime the whole stadium is going to be destroyed and will never be rebuilt – Liverpool will never play there ever again! – can you imagine? Half of Liverpool would be delighted but the other half devastated and

for some it would seem like the end of the earth unimaginable to think of life without watching Liverpool at Anfield.

But in Mark chapter 13 Jesus tells his disciples about the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem – which was even more shocking – there had been a temple in Jerusalem for a 1000 years, more than that it was absolutely vital to their relationship with God – the temple was the place where sacrifices for sin were made so that they could draw near to God – if the temple was destroyed – what would be left – it would seem like the end of the earth.

So now as we come to Mark 13

The thing that we can all agree on is this in this chapter Jesus is talking about two things:

- The destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem which happened in ad 70 – destroyed by the Romans
- His return at the end of the age.

The difference of opinions comes as to when he is referring to the destruction of the Temple and when he is referring to his return.

Straight up I'll put my cards on the table – I think he is basically speaking of the destruction of the temple pretty much from v5-31 and of his return from v32-37 – as I say probably not the most common view – so I am not going to be dogmatic about this – you may disagree – but let me talk us through it and then think about what it means for us now, today.

The final thing before we get going – which I think is very helpful to see is that the destruction of the Temple in ad 70 is in effect a mini-version of what will happen when Jesus returns, because this was an act of God’s judgment which also serves to point forward to the definitive final judgment of God when Christ returns – which is why even when he is talking about the destruction of the temple much of what Jesus talks about connects with and shadows the reality of his final judgment.

So the chapter begins – Jesus and his disciples are leaving the Temple and the disciples comment on what an amazing building it is – massive stone, magnificent buildings – which prompts Jesus to say v2 do you see all these great buildings – not one stone will be left on another – every one will be thrown down - - there is a time coming when this great magnificent temple will be destroyed.

So its not surprising as soon as they hear this that the disciples ask him “when will these things happen and what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?”.

Now note firstly – **when will these things** happen? – what things –well obviously from what he has just been saying - the destruction of the temple and then look at v30 I tell you this generation will certainly not pass away until **all these things have happened** – the most straightforward reading of that – all these things – the destruction of the temple will take place within the time of this generation. Jesus expects that all these things he has been talking about will take place during the lifetime of that present generation – and Jesus is absolutely right – in 70 ad the Romans came and ransacked Jerusalem and the temple was completely destroyed and

has never been rebuilt, but its also really important that his words do come true because he says in the next breath – v31 “Heaven and earth will pass away but my words will never pass away” – My words are utterly true and trustworthy – trust me.

But they also ask “and what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled” – now in Matthew’s gospel and his account of this conversation we get a little bit more detail – there they ask Jesus “when will this happen **AND** what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” Matt 24:3.

This is helpful because we see there what I think is implied in Mark 13 that for the disciples they assumed all three things would go together the destruction of the temple, the coming of the Lord Jesus in great power to establish the kingdom of God in all its fulness and the end of the age – I think this is the sense of their question: “what will be the sign that they are **all** about to be fulfilled?” – what is the “**all** “? –

the destruction of the temple **AND** the return of Christ and the day of judgment the day when the kingdom would be fully established – and so you see firstly Jesus talks about the destruction of the temple v5-31 and then there is a real change a definite change in v32 – he’s been talking about the destruction of the temple – change of topic v32 **BUT** – about **that day or hour** - what day or hour? The day when Jesus will come in great power returning to judge the living and the dead

So firstly I'm suggesting that Jesus begins to speak about the destruction of the temple and the time leading up to it from v5 to v31 – So let's look at that first of all:

Mark 13:5-31

Jesus tells them about what life will be like leading up to and including the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple:

It will be a time in which there will be false Christ's claiming to be Jesus, there will be wars and rumours of wars, there will be earthquakes and famines

And for the disciples? They will face opposition and persecution, v9 they will be handed over to local councils and flogged in the synagogues, they will be arrested and put on trial.

And in the midst of all that, despite such opposition – the gospel will be proclaimed, not just in Jerusalem and Judea but outwards into Samaria and then the ends of the earth so Jesus says in v10 the gospel must first be preached to the all nations.

And then v14-23 Jesus speaks of the actual time of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple and how terrible it will be –

V14 “when you see the abomination that causes desolation standing where it does not belong – let the reader understand” – there's a kind of irony there for if ever there is a passage that many readers struggle to understand its precisely this one! But he is quoting here from Daniel 9 v27 that speaks of one who will set up an abomination that causes desolation in the temple, abolishing

sacrifices and desecrating the temple – and Jesus is saying that this is what the Romans will do – they will besiege the city, destroy the temple and it will be so bad – pray it is not in winter, and when it comes – v14 those who are in Judea should flee to the hills – get out, escape – one early church writer says, “when the Romans fell upon Jerusalem, the church at Jerusalem left the city and moved to a town called pella” – they did indeed flee, they got out.

And again the warnings in v21-23 watch out for false messiahs and false prophets – trying to deceive and lead you astray – so be on your guard. And then in v23 he warns be on your guard I have told you everything in advance. That is important – so when it all happens remember that I told you – don't be surprised but also you will see just how trustworthy my words are.

Let me suggest that you could map v4-13 onto the book of Acts

In Acts we have recorded famine and earthquake, the disciples were thrown out of the synagogues and flogged put on trial and when they were on trial they were filled with the Holy Spirit so they spoke with great boldness and power as Jesus promises in v11 “just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking but the Holy Spirit”

And in Acts we see the gospel go from Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth – as Acts finishes the gospel has come to Rome.

So then we come to this section v24-27

And many assume that here Jesus is referring to his second coming and we can see why, but for me the problem with that is this is still part of what Jesus is talking about when he says in v30 this generation will not pass away until all these things have happened.

So I still think Jesus is still referring to what will happen in the lifetime of those who are listening to him this present generation – let me explain why and you can decide whether or not you agree with me!

V24 sounds as though it might be referring to the 2nd coming but actually Jesus again is quoting from the OT – from Isaiah 13:10 which speaks of God’s judgment upon Babylon and Isaiah 34:4 referring to God’s judgment upon Edom – this is typical biblical language to refer to great cataclysmic events in particular of God’s judgment and if his judgment upon Babylon and Edom caused such upheaval how much more his judgment falling upon Israel and Jerusalem as she rejects her messiah. It sounds like the 2nd coming because it is a foretaste of what it will be like when Jesus comes finally to bring judgment upon the whole earth

And then again v26 the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory – I think most read and assume this is referring to Christ coming to earth on the clouds - returning to judge but in fact Jesus is again quoting from the Old Testament. This is taken directly from Daniel 7

– where Daniel has this vision of the throne of God in heaven – the Ancient of days and then as he saw the thrones v13 “there before me was one like a son of man coming with the clouds of heaven”

coming that is – not to earth but to God to the throne of God he approached the Ancient of days and was led into his presence and then what happened?

“He was given authority glory and sovereign power all nations and peoples of every language worshipped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed” Dan 7:14

The son of Man (Jesus) coming on the clouds to God where he received all authority in heaven and on earth and began to reign. SO when Jesus died and rose and then ascended into heaven he came to God the Father to receive all power and authority in heaven and on earth and then began his great work of spreading his kingdom on earth through the proclamation of the gospel

So Jesus this is what Jesus is speaking of here and what happens as a consequence of his receiving all authority he then v27 sends his angels to gather his elect from the ends of earth - that is the gospel now is to go to all nations

So judgment coming – terrible destruction and upheaval – false prophets and false messiahs, the spread of the gospel – and the time characterised by war, earthquake famine and upheaval and turmoil – and the reason its sounds so like our day is because it is – just like it! This is the nature of life in this fallen world from Jesus death and resurrection to the destruction of the temple and on until the end of time when Jesus returns and during this time – Jesus gives clear commands to his disciples, as the gospel spreads from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth – in the midst of opposition and conflict, Jesus

gives his disciples these vital commands – watch out that you are not deceived by false prophets and messiahs – so be on your guard, don't be surprised that you face opposition – everyone will hate you because of me, if they crucified Jesus how will they treat his followers? but here is what is important – stand firm – endure keep on keeping on for the one who stands firm to the end will be saved

Mark 13:32- 37

And so then v32 begins this new section – BUT about THAT day or hour – which day what hour? The day when the Son of Man will return as judge the great and dreadful day of the Lord – the one thing we know about when that will be is that -we don't know when it will be so the one thing we can be confident about is when ever someone claims to know when it is going to be – they are wrong they don't know.

So because we don't know Jesus gives this command – so be on your guard, be alert, and again v35 keep watch and note also the way in which v37 now also has a wider application than just to his listening disciples – what I say to you I say to everyone – watch

SO what does this have to say to us, what does this mean for us?

Jesus will return – we can be absolutely sure of this -he said the temple would be destroyed and it was, he says he will return – he will and his return will bring the kingdom of God in all its fullness and full and final salvation – the end to sin, suffering and death – salvation for all those who have put their trust in him but his return will also bring his full and final judgment. The reason this is delayed, the reason so far he has delayed 2000 years is because of

v27 – the present ongoing work of gathering his people from all over the world as the gospel is proclaimed – he holds back so that people might be saved, rescued from this coming judgment by turning to Christ and putting their trust in him now, while there is still time. The danger is we don't really believe that his return is really going to happen and it could happen any time – that is the point of v32 but about that day or hour no one knows so be on your guard, be alert – be ready!

It may be that this is God's word for you today – perhaps you're thinking about the Christian faith, been exploring it, may be tuning in to watch on line – here's what all this means – Jesus is going to return but he longs that you are ready, that you have put your trust in him. Don't make the mistake of thinking it will never happen or that its not urgent. If he did return today – how would he find you? Ready? Until he returns he is at work gathering in his people, bringing people to himself – might that be you – even today, that he is holding back so that you might be saved and come to him

2. Christians – be on guard, be alert, keep watch

stay alert keep watch v35-36 you don't know when the owner of the house will come back... if he comes suddenly do not let him find you sleeping.

Is this a word for some of us – to use Jesus picture here – you are in the house, you are a Christian you do belong to Jesus but over time – you've started to grow sleepy, drowsy may even have fallen asleep – you are no longer alert switched on, vigilant. After you've been a

christian a while, there is a danger you can begin to settle down, switch off a bit, after the initial wonderful experience of becoming a christian when you can't get over how amazing the gospel is and how amazing it is that Jesus loves you and died for you that you've been forgiven and you've found a church where you are welcomed and loved and at first you're like a sponge soaking everything up, can't get enough of it – day after day week after week discovering amazing new truths in God's Word – but gradually over time – it can happen that we begin to calm down, slow down, other things begin to preoccupy us,– we can begin to become a bit sleepy switched off, we lose that fire that zeal that enthusiasm. We become a bit more complacent, where we used to be vigilant in wanting to be more like Jesus and fighting against sin and temptation, we've taken our foot off the pedal, - sometimes find ourselves going through the motions where once we used to so enthusiastic and committed, we find ourselves more half-hearted – Jesus says –live your life now, in the light of the sure and certain reality that I will return and suddenly– so be expectant live now as though if I was returning today I'd find you alert, still committed to the spread of the gospel, the work of gathering in the people of God from all around the world – not drowsy, not asleep but alert living wholeheartedly for me