

Jason Upchurch - Mark 13:1-2 - The Good News that the Temple Will Be Destroyed - Part 1

This morning we come to the section of Mark that is often called the Olivet Discourse. It's called that because the Lord Jesus leaves the Temple after a long day of teaching and debating the religious leaders and goes across the Kidron Valley and up the Mt. of Olives. So he's sitting on the Mt. of Olives. And he teaches his disciples about the destruction of Jerusalem. It's a discourse: a teaching, a lesson on the destruction of Jerusalem. So it's the teaching on the Mt. of Olives: the Olivet Discourse

This is the aftermath of the long day of Jesus confronting the religious leaders as hypocrites. But the night is not over. All the intense judgement Jesus pronounced on them throughout the day is going to come to a culmination in this teaching throughout the evening.

Now, the first two verses take place just outside the Temple. As he's leaving the Temple, the disciples are awestruck by the Temple and the city and the lights. I remember the first time I visited Los Angeles as a kid, I think I was 12 or 13. Dad flew my sister and I down there to see Disneyland and Knott's Berry Farm and Sea World. And I think one of the more striking things I remember was seeing LA at night in all of its glory. As a kid from a small city seeing all the lights and glowing and glitter was amazing. I was just there last week and I still love the lights and amazing buildings.

And that's what's going on here. This temple would have been the most amazing structure they had ever seen in their lives. And because it was Passover week the place was packed with people. Torches everywhere, lights, people moving about. And so as they leave the greatest building they've really ever been in, it would be amazing. And so they say to Jesus, "Look, teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!"

Jerusalem was an amazing sight to see in the first century. They were leaving a Temple Mount that was more amazing than Solomon's Temple in all its glory. Josephus tells us that the walls of Jerusalem at that time were incredible. Depending on where you were they were 50-100ft high. Very thick. The modern walls of Jerusalem are much lower and thinner than they were.

The city, from an ancient perspective was impenetrable. So Jesus's response to them is striking. "Do you see these great buildings?" Not one stone will be left upon another."

That is an absolutely amazing statement. That would be like me back in LA and someone saying, "Do you see all these buildings? A nuclear bomb will wipe all of them out." How is that possible?

In fact, this statement is so amazing the disciples don't seem to say anything in response for a little while. **Vss. 1-2** happen as they are walking out of the Temple. **Vss. 3-4** happen once they're on top of Mt. of Olives overlooking the city at least 5-10 minutes later, if not longer. **Read 1-4**

So here's what's happening. Jesus tells the disciples this shocking news: Jerusalem and the Temple will be literally leveled to the ground. And their natural reaction is: when is that going to happen?

Well, we know from history that happened in 70AD, just 37 years or so after Jesus gave this very prophecy. In less than a generation, the Roman armies would come into Jerusalem and destroy the city and the Temple.

From the disciples' perspective and from anyone's perspective that was really unthinkable. There's no way the Temple - God's Temple - could ever be destroyed. But that's exactly what Jesus is saying. Within one generation, the Temple will be destroyed.

Now if you've been a Christian for any amount of time you know that this section is a difficult section. I remember reading through this section as a young believer and I really had no idea what Jesus was talking about because it can get pretty confusing.

Added to that I was told by many people - and I believed for a long time - that some of what Jesus is talking about is not the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD but some of this is actually talking about his second coming.

And then added to that difficulty is that I was taught in Dispensational churches that there's a secret rapture, a 7 year tribulation and a second coming after that and Jesus is talking about all those things in this section.

And I for the life of me could never figure out which event Jesus was talking about. It was very confusing.

When I was at the Shepherd's Conference I was having dinner with some brothers from and I asked what their pastor was preaching on. They said **Matt 24** and the rapture. I said "Oh really?" And they said "What do you mean?" And I told them what I'm about to tell you that this section has nothing to do with the rapture or the second coming and only has to do with the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD. And they looked at me like I was a neon green unicorn.

Now, if you believe this is talking about the rapture or the second coming, that's totally fine. We'll agree to disagree. But I hope to make a compelling case for this being only referring to the destruction in 70 AD. And at the very least I think you'll be able to see a why I think it should be understood that way.

Now, let me show you some of the confusing verses because every side needs to acknowledge - if they're being honest - that this is a tough passage. The Olivet Discourse is covered in all 3 synoptic gospels: Matthew, Mark and Luke. And they're similar, but depending on which one you're reading there are some added difficulties.

So here are some difficulties. 5 Difficulties.

1) The Question the Disciples ask is difficult. Turn to Matt 24:3-4. Read

This is Matthew's version and the place most people turn to. The difficulty is in **Vs. 3** because the first question is the same but the disciples add: what will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age? That's hard because it sounds like the disciples are asking 2 separate questions. When will Jerusalem be destroyed and when will your second coming be?

But I don't think that's what they're asking. I think they're asking the same question, but 2 different ways. Here's why: the disciples still don't understand Jesus is going to die and rise again. They have no idea that Jesus is going to ascend into heaven in 7 weeks. And they certainly don't understand that the Temple is going to be destroyed and that Jesus is going to go to heaven for at least 2,000 years. They still think Jesus is going to take over and be King.

Remember this is Tuesday. But in two days Jesus will be teaching in the Upper Room that one of the disciples will betray him? They had no idea. And then remember Peter in the Garden of Gethsemane? Ready to fight to the death for Jesus? He has no concept of Jesus dying. Then you remember after he died, they all thought everything was over? Then when he rose, half still didn't believe. Then when Jesus ascended they're all standing there looking up with their mouths open and the angel's like "Get to work!"

The only thing on their mind is when Jesus will come into his kingdom and the Messianic rule of Messiah begin.

When they ask "what will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age" they have no concept for the second coming of Jesus. It sounds a awful lot like the second coming from our perspective. But, listen, that's not even on their radar to ask. That'd be like them asking which is better, Android or Apple? They have no concept of those realities because they still think Messiah is going to rule on the earth.

So when we're talking about this section, most people turn to **Matthew 24** and this is a hard thing. Suffice to say that for now what I think they're asking is when is Jesus going to come to reign?

Daniel 7 prophecies the Messiah as coming to inherit a Kingdom. They think it's on earth. Jesus knows it's in heaven.

The end of the age they think is when Messiah reigns forever and ever. Well, that's true! But we believe that began at Jesus's ascension. When he ascended into heaven and sat on the throne of God to rule over the

nations. He's seated on the throne of David right now. So it is the end of the age. And Jerusalem being destroyed confirms that the last age - the OT - is over.

So the questions that the disciples ask make it difficult. But we have to understand their question not from our vantage point, but from their vantage point of not knowing the future. Think about this: all the gospels were written before this prophecy came true. Some people think John's gospel was written in the 90s but I think all of the were written before 70AD.

They put down in ink and copied hundreds of times Jesus's words about the destruction of Jerusalem before it happened.

If he was wrong about Jerusalem he would be exposed as a massive false prophet because this prediction is so clear. But if he's right - and he was - this would be the pinnacle prediction of his life. And it was. Because the unthinkable happened within a generation. **Back to Mark 13.**

So the first thing we see is that even the question the disciples ask is difficult.

2) There are a lot of phenomenon's that occur that seem to be true of our day. **Read 7-8**

So we have all these wars and rumors of wars. Russia this, China that. Ukraine, Taiwan, Afghanistan. Seems like maybe Jesus is talking about our time. Every time there's a major earthquake you get pastors on TV talking about prophecy and they get out charts about how there are more earthquakes now then 1000 years ago, even though there were no seismographs back then.

3) Then there are verses that seem to confirm a great tribulation. **Read 19**

I mean Jesus says it's the worst it will ever be - that must be the future tribulation because that's going to be really bad, right? That seems to confirm other passages that indicate things will be really bad when Jesus comes back. Well, maybe.

4) There's cosmic signs. **Read 24-27**

That sure sounds like the second coming. Or maybe the rapture. Sun turning to black, moon to blood - that's never literally happened.

5) Then we have what seems to be the rapture passage. **Read 32**

This seems to be talking about the secret rapture. Now, most people who hold to this view, if they're honest, really have no idea what event Jesus is talking about. They believe it's either hard to know, or maybe it's actually talking about multiple events and multiple fulfillments.

Now, again, if that's your view, we're friends. It's okay to disagree here. These are secondary issues.

But what I think is happening here, as amazing as it sounds, I think Jesus is just talking about the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD. I think he's actually just answering the question the disciples asked him.

I don't think anything in this chapter has anything to do with the second coming of Jesus. He's not talking about a secret rapture. He's not talking about some end times Great Tribulation. He's not talking about his second coming in glory.

I think he's actually just answering the question that the disciples ask him about: the Temple and city being destroyed. He's just talking about the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD. Now, granted, he uses some very interesting language and imagery, imagery that he borrows from the OT. Imagery that those familiar with the OT would instantly recognize.

The disciples listening to Jesus would not be thinking about the end of the world. They didn't ask him about that. He made a statement about Jerusalem being destroyed, he responded, so they asked a follow up question.

Well, then why all the strange language? Because this wouldn't be the first time Jerusalem had been destroyed. Jerusalem had been destroyed several times over the centuries. And the language Jesus uses here is borrowed from the OT from places where God threatened to destroy Jerusalem. So what Jesus is doing is using language that is very familiar to the disciples from the OT about judgment and he's just using it again to explain what he's talking about.

As we walk through this section, I'll point out how this is talking about this current generation.

Now, before we do that I want to actually have some application here. Because this is a technical section and a difficult section and it's going to take us some time to get through. But if all this happened in 70 AD I think it's important to reflect on why it matters to us today.

1) What Jesus says is always true. There's a reason that this one prophecy takes up 1/16 of Mark's gospel. Because it is astonishing and amazing and unthinkable and - get this - amazingly accurate. It comes true!

No one in a million years would have imagined that Jerusalem would ever be destroyed. And no one in a billion years would imagine that it would be destroyed in one generation. Absolutely unthinkable. How could that happen? It'd be like watching the Titanic sail away on the maiden voyage and saying "That's the last we'll ever see of this ship." Unthinkable.

There was nothing happening at the time of Jesus that would ever give that indication. The Temple wasn't even fully complete during Jesus's time. And actually wasn't fully complete when it was destroyed. It was one of the Crown Jewels of the Roman Empire. Herod and Rome had spent an amazing amount of money on the city. Why would they level it?

But here's Jesus telling the disciples that it will be leveled, no stone upon another, within 40 years. And you know what? It happened, just like Jesus said it would.

There are many hard teachings of Jesus. Predestination, salvation of Gentiles, resurrection, marriage, satan. And you know what? They're all true. Every one. We can trust everything God says in his Word. Even the most astonishing claims he makes.

2) Jesus will judge. The reason for this judgment is that the religious system in Jerusalem is so corrupt there is no redeeming it. Jesus isn't going to try to reform it, it's too late for that. What Jesus will do in his death and resurrection is eliminate the sacrificial system forever replaced by his once-for-all sacrifice as he dies on the cross in the place of his people.

This destruction is a direct result of the sinfulness of the religious leaders. And Jesus is promising judgment. And his judgement is good and right and severe.

3) We need to be diligent students of Scripture. A lot of what Jesus says here, especially the second half of the chapter, are really echoes of the OT. If you read this section quickly it might sound bizarre and unusual. But if you know that Jesus is citing OT passages to talk about this situation then you know there's nothing really all that bizarre about it at all.

One of the reasons I want to go through this section slowly is to make sure you guys understand these connections. They're not complicated to understand. But especially because most of us are a little weak in the OT we're not familiar with a lot of what Jesus is saying.

So just know, we can trust what Jesus says. We can trust that Jesus will judge. And we need to be diligent students of Scripture - especially when it's confusing.

So we're going to go through this slowly and I'm just going to add to the outline each time. That's my introduction. This morning we're going to get through 2 verses and point 1 on the outline.

1) The severity of Jerusalem's destruction. Read 1-2

We need to understand that Jerusalem had been captured and conquered many times in its history. But it hadn't always been leveled to the ground. In ancient times, if you're a conqueror and want to capture a town to add to your kingdom, you don't necessarily want to destroy the city completely. You want to kill the people and leave the city intact as much as possible. In fact, if you remember that's basically what God commanded the Jews to do when they conquered the Promised Land. Kill the people and take their houses.

It doesn't make sense to demolish something only to have to rebuild it later, especially if the city is state of the art. Maybe you'd burn down an old city, but certainly not something like Jerusalem.

What Jesus is saying here is not that Jerusalem will simply be invaded. It's not just that Rome will come in and take over. Actually, Rome is already in control.

What Jesus is describing here is an utter destruction of the entire city. A scraping of the city to absolute rubble. Not one stone will be left upon another.

Now just that statement is significant because Jerusalem - like much of Ancient Rome - was built with massive stones. Just around the Temple area the stones used for the Temple weighed 10-50 tons each. These were not small bricks or boulders. These were incredibly huge rectangular stones.

What Jesus is saying is that the destruction of Jerusalem would be complete. It wouldn't be a half-hearted effort to destroy the city. It would be absolute devastation of everything that the Jews held dear. Their most holy city and the most holy site of worship would be brought to an end. And I will tell you I think it's significant that a Temple has never been rebuilt in 2000 years. Even though the city has been rebuilt, there is a permanence to this judgement against the sacrificial system.

In fact the author of Hebrews wrote his book probably in the late 60s seems to anticipate the destruction of Jerusalem. It seems that by that time there were enough rumblings between Rome and Jerusalem that he knew it was going to happen soon. So when he's talking about the sacrificial system, he says it is ready to vanish and fade away. He knew what Jesus had prophesied. He knew the destruction that Jesus had promised. And it was about to be over.

And just think about how committed to utter devastation the Romans were to take the time to undo 30 ton granite rocks. I mean, the manpower in ancient times to leave no stone upon another would have been incredible.

Even now, around the base of the Temple Mount, these massive granite stones are still lying on the ground. It would take an immense amount of effort to move them even now with modern equipment. Think about how much effort it would have taken 2,000 years ago. That's the fury and wrath of God through the agency of Rome against this wicked people who rejected the Messiah. Not one stone left - God's wrath against Jerusalem would be exhaustive and severe.

The main historian that we have at the time that recorded a lot of these event as was a man named Flavius Josephus. It's from him that we learn so much about the fall of Jerusalem. And I will quote him a fair amount throughout this section because he's really the only eye witness account we have in antiquity of this event. He never became a Christian so there's a sense in which he's a third party.

And he confirms so much of what Jesus says.

He was a scholar, historian and military leader so he was perfectly suited for recording the destruction. He was born to a well-off family who was part of the Jewish aristocracy. The Romans actually captured him but he was able to win their favor and was allowed to write about the destruction of Jerusalem.

The work itself is massive and exhaustive. But most historians agree that it's also somewhat tainted. Josephus was in a hard spot because he was a Jew and wanted to give an accurate history, but he was under the authority of Rome and so couldn't paint Rome in too bad of a light. So his work is not entirely objective. Nevertheless he provides incredible insights.

This is from the aftermath of the destruction. The Jewish War: Book 7, Chapter 1:1:

“Now, as soon as the army had no more people to slay or to plunder, because there remained none to be objects of their fury...Caesar gave orders that they should now demolish the entire city and temple, but should leave as many of the towers standing as were of the greatest eminency...in order to demonstrate to posterity what kind of city it was, and how well fortified, which the Roman valor had subdued.”

So just stop there for a second. Rome actually left 3 of the most amazing towers in Jerusalem intact. Why? So in time to come when people came upon this absolute ruin they would know that at one time there was actually an amazing city there. People would think “Man, whatever was here was phenomenal” - yes, and Rome defeated it.

Josephus goes on: “but for all the rest of the wall, it was so thoroughly laid even with the ground by those that dug it up to the foundation, that there was left nothing to make those that came after believe it had ever been inhabited. (4) This was the end which Jerusalem came to by the madness of those that were for innovations; a city otherwise of great magnificence, and of mighty fame among all mankind.”

Not only did they tear down the wall, they dug up the foundation of the wall so it couldn't be rebuilt. Remember Nehemiah how he rebuilt the wall of Jerusalem? Presumably there was some kind of sub-foundation he put those stones on. Rome wasn't having any of that and actually dug up the very foundation of the walls of Jerusalem so they wouldn't ever build it again.

So when travelers walked past Jerusalem in the following years they would see this weird site: three really amazing towers standing in the middle of nowhere surrounded by rubble.

Does that mean Jesus' prediction didn't come true? No stone left upon another? No, I think his prediction did come true and vividly so. You know when you're driving down the road and you come across a big open field and it's all manicured and green and lawn is freshly mown? How do you know if it's a park or a cemetery? You know it's a cemetery if there are tombstones. You know what Rome left in Jerusalem after the destruction? The Romans left were 3 massive tombstones to Jerusalem's destruction and death. They marked the grave of this massive city.

Jesus's prediction of judgement on the city came true. One generation. All the wrath and fury of God for the false religion of the Jewish leaders came amazingly true.

By the way, this is why we preach the gospel: because if you think the wrath and fury of God against a city was bad, just know the wrath and fury of God that awaits people who stand before him in judgement is far worse.

In light of this lesser judgement we call all men everywhere to repent - just like Jesus did to those religious leaders. God is merciful and kind, while he may be found. But judgement is coming.

Pray