

Jason Upchurch - Mark 13:3-8 - The Good News that the Temple Will Be Destroyed - Part 2

We are back in the Olivet Discourse this morning. This is the teaching of Jesus to his disciples on the Mt of Olives about the destruction of Jerusalem that occurred in 70AD. I put this picture up. This is modern day Jerusalem, so obviously it's bigger and there's the Dome on the Rock rather than the Temple, but this is basically the view Jesus would have had while he's talking to the disciples about the destruction of Jerusalem.

Now, I mentioned last time that many people believe this section is talking about not only the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD but also the second coming of Jesus. And for those who hold to a pretribulation premillennialism position many see this as talking about the rapture as well.

I think most of you know I don't hold that view. It really is okay if you do. The specifics of eschatology are actually tertiary issues: 3rd level issues where we can hold different views within our congregation and be okay. As long as you know Jesus is coming back to judge, there's a resurrection, a heaven and a hell we're all good. We can have good natured debates with kind hearts and open Bibles. Most of you know I hold to an amillennial position. I believe that Jesus will return and create the New Heavens and New Earth and eternity will begin. That seems to be the simplest explanation of the passages in Scripture.

But to some extent no matter what eschatology you hold to, it doesn't really matter in terms of understanding this passage or any passage. We should always let the passage speak for itself. We never want to jam our view into a passage, we want to let it speak on its own terms.

And it seems clear to me here that Jesus is entirely focused on the exact question the disciples ask in response to his claim that Jerusalem will be leveled to the ground. **Vs. 4:** when will this happen and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?

And I think all Jesus does in this chapter and in **Matt 24, Luke 21** is answer that question. If you missed last week's sermon I would encourage you to listen to it to get some background information. As we work through this section it will be like one big long ongoing sermon.

This prophecy of Jesus was an astonishing claim: Jerusalem gone in one generation. If it didn't come true Jesus would be completely exposed as a false prophet.

But he makes this audacious claim and the gospel writers put it in their gospel accounts before 70AD - before it happened. Think about that: they are banking on Jesus's words being true and they wrote these books down and sent them out before it happened. So they were all on the hook for this prophecy happening. And it did.

So let's dive back in. Last time we saw in **Vss. 1-2 1) the destruction of Jerusalem would be severe**. Not one stone left upon another. Jerusalem wasn't just sacked, it wasn't just invaded. It was leveled. The only thing left standing according to Josephus were 3 towers that acted like tombstones over the fallen city.

This proclamation of judgment prompts Jesus's closest 4 disciples to pull him aside and ask him more about this. This is a wild prophecy. As has often happened in his ministry, when Jesus says something this over-the-top the 4 of them will pull him aside and try to get more information. Well, he gives it to them.

Let me give you a basic overview of the chapter because I think this will help you follow the flow:

Vss. 1-2: Pronouncement of Destruction

Vss. 3-4: Questions: timing and *the sign*

Vss. 5-8: Non-sign events: Events that don't indicate anything

Vss. 9-13: Prepare for Increasing Persecution (not a sign)

Vss. 14-23: The One Sign to Look for

Vss. 24-27: Confirmation that Jesus is the Son of Man

Vss. 28-31: Parable 1: Fig tree - The Sign is Crucial

Vss. 32-36: Parable 2: Watchman - Watch for the Sign

That's really the flow of the chapter. I probably should have pointed that out last time, but there's so much to say it's hard to cram it all in. But again they ask when and the signs, he responds by giving various signs then answers the when.

2) The Disciples' Question. **Read 3-4**

Okay, so there are basically 2 questions that they ask. First, when will this happen? Second, what is **the sign** it's about to happen? I mentioned last week that Matthew's gospel records "what will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age?" I won't go through all that again, except to say that from the disciples' perspective those are all the same question. They thought Jesus would be coronated as the Messiah king right away. They had no concept of his suffering death for sins, his resurrection, his ascension into heaven or the ministry of the gospel to all nations at this point.

Messiah was to reign from Zion forever. How could it be destroyed? That's exactly what they're asking.

And Jesus actually answers the questions in reverse order. He talks about various signs and then talks about the timing. So he doesn't get to the timing part right away.

So let's talk about those questions for a minute. When will this happen? We have several statements from the passage that indicate that it will happen soon. The biggest is **Vs. 30-31 Read**

Matthew 24:34 says the same thing and **Luke 21:32** says the same thing. This generation will not pass away before all these things take place.

So Jesus makes it clear that this generation - the generation he's talking to, standing in front of him - will not pass away until all these things take place. What things? The signs and the destruction of the city. In fact, his words would sooner pass away, than the generation that's living. That's how certain it is that Jerusalem and the temple will be destroyed within 40-50 years.

That phrase "this generation" throughout the gospels never means some future generation, it always refers to the people he's talking to.

And not only does Jesus say that this will all happen within this generation, everything else about this section makes it clear that these people he's talking to will see these things happen. Let me point some things out.

First, the context of Jesus's answer is that the disciples asking about the Temple they are looking right then and there. They're not asking about some future temple, and he's not talking about some future temple. He says "Do you not see **these great buildings?**" These ones right here will be destroyed.

Side: Except for the apocalyptic language that Jesus uses, there is nowhere in this chapter where Jesus explicitly indicates some future temple will be made and destroyed. Everything is focused here.

Second, the warnings to not be led astray are given to these disciples. **Read 5, 9, 11, 13, 14, 23, 28-29, 33, 37.**

One of the concerns over and over that Jesus has is that his disciples are prepared for the years leading up to this judgment. He's not saying "Don't worry, this isn't talking about you guys." No, he's very concerned that all his disciples specifically are on guard in that generation.

Third, the descriptions Jesus gives really only make sense for those living in Judaea in the first century:

Vs. 9: His disciples will be delivered over to synagogues and councils to be flogged. I don't know about you, but I don't have any fear of being delivered over to synagogues. In fact, I don't even know where the synagogues are in Spokane.

But if you read the book of Acts and Philippians, **2 Cor. 11** Paul and the missionaries were constantly beaten by Jews and Roman rulers.

Vs. 14-18 Read: Those who are living in Judaea should flee to the mountains. I know this sounds obvious but we don't live in Judea, so we're not concerned. We don't sleep on housetops. That's what they did in ancient times in Israel. We don't have to worry about travel speed because we could drive 400 miles on a tank of gas before anything happens.

Matthew's gospel says pray that it doesn't happen on a Sabbath. Well, that doesn't bother us because we're not Jews. Jews in Jerusalem were confined to taking only so many steps on a Sabbath. But if you were a Jewish Christian in the first century and still followed some of the Law - which many Jewish Christians did - it might violate your conscience to travel. And certainly for unbelieving Jews they wouldn't be willing to travel.

So all of this points to a first century fulfillment.

What about the signs? Well, if you look closely at the disciples' question, they ask very simply "What will be the sign" (singular). So what Jesus does is give a whole bunch of non signs, things that do not indicate the destruction. And then he gives exactly 1 sign that Jerusalem is about to be destroyed. And when they see that sign, they better run like life depends on it. Don't go into your house, don't grab your coat. You run as fast as you can into the mountains.

What's the one sign? **Read 14-18**

When you see the abomination of desolation standing where it ought not be. What is that? A lot of people think it's when a temple is rebuilt and someone comes in and defiles it in the future during the tribulation. But it's not. **Look at Luke 21:20-23.**

Luke is super helpful for us because he is writing to Theophilus, a gentile who is probably not familiar with Jewish writings and Jewish history. So Luke actually spells out some of the complicated things for us. What is this abomination that causes desolation? **Read 20-23**

So what Matthew and Mark call the abomination of desolation Luke simply calls the Roman armies. Jesus is saying "When you see Roman armies coming to Jerusalem, you run like crazy." This is the only sign that Jesus gives that Jerusalem is about to be destroyed.

So let's look back at **Mark 13**. We've seen the pronouncement of judgement. We've seen the disciples questions.

3) Let's look at the Non Signs. Read 5-8

Why do I say these are non-signs? Because Jesus lists all these things and then explicitly says in **Vs. 7** the end is not yet. These signs do not point to the end. Luke's gospel says "for these things must take place but the end will not be at once."

And then he goes on to give even more non-signs In **Vs. 8**. These are the beginning of the birth pangs. These are the Braxton Hicks contractions of pregnancy. Braxton Hicks is not labor. In fact many ladies don't even feel Braxton Hicks. This is just going to be the normal course of events in the coming years as the disciples preach the gospel. And we'll unpack these more in a minute.

But first, I think it's necessary to say that in America in our Christian world we've been told for so long that this passage is talking about the second coming of Jesus or the Rapture that it's hard to disconnect from that idea as we read this section.

One example of how ingrained these descriptions are into our thinking is that you'll often hear Christians talking about how we must be getting close to the return of Jesus. They'll say "Well, I don't put a date on it but it's clear that the signs are happening."

But here's the thing: if you ask them "What are the signs you're talking about" they will inevitably point to the Olivet Discourse and usually this paragraph. I even Googled it this last week. "What are the signs Jesus will

return soon.” And there are some crazy websites out there, but even the legit ones will point to this very section. And these are legit brothers who will say “wars, rumors of wars, famines, earthquakes, so on.”

But remember Jesus here is simply answering the question of when Jerusalem will be destroyed. And the great irony is that not only is Jesus saying that these events will happen in the first century, but these events are actually **not signs** of anything. They are not even signs of the first destruction of Jerusalem.

So if you’ve heard people referring to these things as signs of the second coming, just know that they are events in the first century and they’re actually non-signs.

In **Vs. 5** Jesus gives a warning, “See that no one leads you astray.” This is a warning that Jesus will give over and over throughout the section. The events that will occur in the Roman world in the years leading up to 70AD might be such that the disciples are confused and maybe a little trigger happy that the destruction is coming.

So Jesus wants to make very sure they are not led astray. And some of these deceptions will be so convincing that even the elect might possibly buy into them. **Read 21-23**

What does that mean? That even genuine Christians will be tempted to follow after false christs and prophets. Their nonsense will be so convincing that even genuine believers who have been chosen by God before the foundation of the world to be saved - the elect - will be enticed to follow their error. And then Jesus reiterates again “be on your guard.”

So what are the non-events? Mark records 4 or 5 depending on how you count them.

A. Many will come in my name. **Read 5-7**

Just to repeat: these are non-signs. These are signs of nothing. Ironically the heading in the ESV says “Signs of the End of the Age” - well you know where they stand. NIV says “The destruction of the Temple and the signs of the end times.” Those headings, just to be clear are not part of the original text of the Bible. They’re chapter headings that the publishers added later. And what’s beyond maddening is that Jesus actually says these are non-signs. They contradict his words just verses later. I digress.

First non-sign: many will come in my name. The idea here is that there will be many false christs and false prophets. **Luke 21:8** says “many will come in my name saying ‘I am he! And the time is at hand!’” Matthew adds that they will lead many astray.

There will be a slew of people in the intervening years who claim that they are the real messiah and that Jerusalem will now be destroyed.

Remember that earlier in Mark’s gospel we talked about how Israel was filled with Messianic fervor long before Jesus came on the scene.

Turn to Acts 5:36-37. This is the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem passing judgment on the apostles for preaching Jesus. And they decide to leave these guys alone based on the advice of Gamaliel. And he makes this passing comment. **Read 35-40**

Gamaliel says let them go. They’d seen a lot of nonsense over the years from political uprising that eventually died down. They think this Jesus thing will die down too. By the way, Gamaliel’s advice is really bad but it worked in the favor of the apostles. **Turn to Acts 8:9-10**

This is the account of Simon the magician which I think we often overlook but notice how Luke describes him. **Read 8-13**

Now, later in the passage it appears that Simon is a false prophet because he just wants to buy the apostles’ miracle working power. He has power - it says he does magic. It doesn’t say he deceives, he does actual

magic and people follow him. But it's nothing like the apostles' miracles and he knows it. But he calls himself the power of God that is great and many people were turning to him. **Turn to Acts 13:4-12**

Paul and Barnabas sail to the island of Cyprus, the large island just off the coast of modern Turkey and here's what they come across. **Read 4-12**

This false prophet was influencing this proconsul, which something like a US Senator in authority. And notice again what he's using: magic. He's a magician, he has legit power.

Paul says in **Gal. 1** that there are those who are preaching a false gospel in the name of Jesus.

He says in **2 Cor. 11** that there are false apostles out there preaching a false gospel. They claim to be preaching Jesus.

He says in **1 Timothy 4:17-18** that Hymanaeus and Philetus have swerved from the truth saying that the resurrection has already happened. They fell into the error of full preterism: Jesus has already come back.

And of course the apostle John says in **1 John 4:1**: Beloved do not believe every spirit but test the spirits to see if they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.

Many of them. And he says again in **2 John 7**: Many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is a deceiver and an anti Christ.

Josephus talks about a Samaritan who wanted to lead a mass of people up to Mt. Gerizzim to see sacred vessels from Temple. He claimed Moses hid them on the mountain. These were rebels and armed to the teeth, so Pontius Pilate cut them off and killed most of them. He had no use for religious fanatics. (Josephus Ant. 18:85-87)

Some years later a man named Theudas said he was a prophet of God (ibid 20:97-99) led a bunch of people to the Jordan River and Roman leader named Cuspius Fadus cut them off, killed a bunch of his followers and cut off Theudas's head.

Josephus mentions that during a famine, another group of men rose up, the sons of Judas of Galilee. You know what happened to them? Slaughtered. (Ibid 101-102)

Others record the incredible amount of deceivers and false messiahs as well (see Eusebius).

Back in Mark 13 Jesus says this is going to be par for the course. The rising up of these deceivers means nothing. It points to nothing. "This must take place" Jesus says but the end is not yet.

Many people coming in the name of Jesus is a sign of nothing actually. It's just the normal day to day life.

B. Wars and Rumors of Wars is the second non-sign. **Read 5-7**

So again, the disciples are not to be alarmed at this. The end - the destruction of Jerusalem - is not yet.

Now, this is something you hear all the time for those who believe that Jesus is talking about end times scenario stuff. China this and Russia that. Saddam Hussein was the anti Christ for a while then it was Bin Laden now it's Putin or Xi Jibping or Biden. Ukraine, Russia, Israel - you name it.

Jodee and I went to a church for a couple of years that would have a prophecy update every New Year's Eve and it was about how Russia was doing this or some leader doing that. Maybe we'll have nuclear war or a third world war because that's what Jesus says and we're close to his coming: wars and rumors of wars.

But again, Jesus is answering the question the disciples asked: when will this temple that we're staring at be destroyed? And what are the signs.

And the second non-sign is wars and rumors of wars. Interestingly, just empirically speaking, we live in one of the safest times our world has ever seen percentage-wise. Major countries even 200 years ago were in constant battle with each other. And if you think of Rome and Greece and China and the Ottomans and Britain the doctrine was conquest: how many countries can I conquer?

Although there are many wars going on and people are dying, percentage wise we live in very safe times. Even if you include world wars, throughout the scope of history we live pretty well around the world.

But the time between Jesus and Jerusalem's demise was plagued by wars and rumors of wars.

One commentary said this: the period A.D. 33-70 witnessed countless military disturbances. An uprising in Caesarea took 20,000 Jewish lives; at Scythopolis 13,000 Jews were killed; in Alexandria 50,000 were slain; 10,000 were killed in Damascus. When the Emperor Caligula ordered his statue to be erected in the temple at Jerusalem (A.D. 40), the Jews refused. As a result, they lived in a state of fearful anxiety over imminent war with Rome and were in such distress that they even neglected to till the land." (Storms, Kingdom Come)

Other historians record wars from Britain to Africa to modern day Turkey. The Roman Parthian war from 58-63 which was basically a war in modern day Iran. There was Boudica's Revolt in 60-61 in Roman Britain. The Batavian Rebellion in 69-70 in the Netherlands and Germany. This fulfills what Jesus says. **Read 7-8**

Not only would there be local uprisings but international conflicts as well. And rumors of them. If you've studied the political history of Rome at all you know there was always some sort of threat or danger. Some coup about to take place or conspiracy to kill the emperor. None of this pointed to anything in particular.

C. Earthquakes and D. Famines. Read 8

Any time there is an earthquake it's a significant event. Even in places that are known for them like California it's significant. And they are actually fairly rare unless you live right next to a volcano.

Remember when Paul and Silas were in prison in Philippi? What caused their chains to be broken? An earthquake. It was so strong the whole prison was shaken and foundation was compromised so much that it could have easily been a jail-break. **Acts 16:26**

Josephus records an earthquake in Jerusalem in 67 AD. An earthquake leveled Pompeii in 62 that leveled part of the city, in 61 there was an earthquake in Asia Minor.

Interestingly, do you remember one thing that happened the moment Jesus died on the cross? An earthquake.

As for famines there was a massive famine in AD 46 which is recorded in **Acts 11:28** and Josephus. Both Tacitus and Josephus record other famines as well.

So what do we do with all of this information? The answer is: nothing. And the disciples in Jesus's day were to do nothing also. Notice again what Jesus tells his disciples to do with the information. **Read 5-8**

He gives 4 statements:

- 1 - Do not be led astray.
- 2 - Do not be alarmed.
- 3 - This must take place, but it's not the end.
- 4 - These are the beginning of the birth pangs.

These aren't the birth pangs. None of these things indicates anything is going to happen to Jerusalem. And these certainly aren't signs of the second coming of Jesus.

You guys, a lot of weird theology has come out trying to make Jesus's simple words here apply to something that they don't apply to. The Left Behind series, the Late Great Planet earth, the signs of the times ministries... a lot of that is based on a really bad understanding of this passage. They'd quote other verses, but this is their bread and butter and I believe it's terribly misguided.

Here's application and I think it's important to us too. It's 2 things, both are commands.

1 - See that no one leads you astray. He's saying these things so they can be on their guard. And we need to be on our guard to listen to Jesus's words. Many people will use these passages for weird and even unbiblical things. Don't be led astray by that. I think most of us know people who've gotten into really weird end times craziness with charts and predictions and nonsense and that's all they think about or talk about and it's odd. Don't do that.

2 - Do not be alarmed. There is a lot of anxiety in Christians about the return of Jesus and the stuff that is supposed to happen around his return. Can I tell you something? Don't be alarmed. We don't need to lose sleep over non-existent signs. I mean, lets say the very worst thing could possibly happen to us: excruciating martyrdom. We're killed for the gospel. Where does that mean we go? Heaven.

The worst thing that could happen to us is the best thing. We don't need to waste time trying to figure out non-signs to time Jesus's coming. We're called to live quiet godly lives, preach the gospel, and eagerly await the return of Jesus who died for sins and rose again.

May we be found faithful when he comes.

Pray