

Jason Upchurch - Mark 13:24-36 - The Good News that the Temple Will Be Destroyed - Part 7

This morning we are winding down our adventure through the Olivet discourse. For some of you the adventure has been fun, others it's been something akin to Frodo trying to endure Middle Earth to make it to Mt. Doom. But we are at the end at last.

As we wind down, let me remind you that this is still just Tuesday of Passion week. The events and words of Jesus in **Mark 11, 12 and 13** all happened on Tuesday, just 3 days before Jesus was crucified. Tuesday takes up almost 20% of Mark's gospel - it's an important day.

I know we've been in the weeds in **Mark 13** for a while, but the bigger context here is that Tuesday morning Jesus cursed the fig tree coming into Jerusalem, then took over the Temple by confounding all the religious leaders and then he spent the rest of the day teaching the crowds in the Temple about the Christ and denouncing the religious hypocrites.

And then at the end of the day as he and the disciples are walking out of the Temple the disciples were marveling at the buildings in Jerusalem. To which Jesus replied the unthinkable: the Temple would be torn down. The disciples were dumbfounded. How could Jesus say something like that? How is that possible? Well, it's possible because it would be God's judgment on this apostate people.

The disciples asked when this would happen and what the sign would be. Jesus then gave them a series of non-signs - events that did not indicate Jerusalem's demise. Then he gave them exactly one sign to look for: Jerusalem being surrounded by Roman armies. When that happens: run as fast as you can away from the city because it will be the worst calamity Jerusalem has ever faced. And all of that came to pass exactly as Jesus said it would.

Then Jesus quotes from the OT: sun, moon and stars. Jesus coming on the clouds of glory and sending out angels.

We covered the first 2 of those last time. The sun, moon and stars language is common biblical language that just means God would judge Jerusalem brutally like he did Babylon, Damascus, the ancient world.

And we also saw that Jesus coming on the clouds of heaven is not the second coming. It's actually a quote from **Daniel 7** where Jesus comes to the Father in heaven on clouds and glory at his ascension. And we don't actually see it, according to Matthew's gospel. What we see is a sign that it happened. And the sign that Jesus ascended into heaven on clouds with power and glory is Jerusalem's destruction.

I do want to make one slight correction to my sermon last time: I said that signs always come after the truth they signify. That's not true. They often come after, but not always.

God gave Gideon a sign with the fleece twice before his mission. God also gave Moses a sign with the staff and blood before he went to Pharaoh. And, of course, here in this very passage there's a sign before Jerusalem is destroyed.

So, in fairness, not every sign is after the event, but many are. And Jesus says that the sign that he is the Son of Man reigning in heaven on David's throne is the destruction of Jerusalem some 37 years later.

Now, last week some of you guys noticed that I didn't get to all my points. And that's true. I skipped my last point because I got up early Sunday morning and added so much that I didn't have time to get to the 3rd point.

These are hard passages. And I know for some of you I'm making some bold claims so I want to make sure I do everything I can to connect the dots about what Jesus is saying.

1) **24-25**: When Jerusalem is destroyed, spiritual and political realities will change forever.

2) **26**: When Jerusalem is destroyed, that will confirm Jesus is reigning as the Son of God in heaven.

3) **27:** When Jerusalem is destroyed, the gospel will go out into all the globe. **Read 27**

So this is again a quote - or a compilation of quotes - from the OT. And here's what I think Jesus is saying: once Jerusalem is destroyed, the gospel will go out to the whole globe and God will save his elect people from all over the planet.

This gathering is not the rapture, it's also not the second coming. This gathering is God gathering his people into his Kingdom from all the nations of the world as they believe in the gospel.

We saw earlier in **Vs. 10** that Jesus said the gospel needed to be preached in all nations - ethnos - before the destruction of Jerusalem. We looked at passages in Acts and Paul's writings where it's clear that what that meant was that the Roman world would hear the gospel before Jerusalem was destroyed. And that happened.

Here, Jesus says after the tribulation of the destruction of Jerusalem God will gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of earth to the ends of heaven. What does that mean?

What he's saying is that there's going to be a transition. The whole Roman world will hear the gospel before Jerusalem is destroyed. But after it's destroyed the gospel will travel to the four winds, the ends of the earth and heavens, and God's elect people will be saved all over the globe. We use the word globe or earth. They used the phrase the "four winds."

What God is doing is gathering his elect: he is saving those who have been chosen from before the foundation of the world for salvation. God is going actually bring Jews and Gentiles from everywhere into the Kingdom by the preaching of the gospel.

How do we know that? Because in the OT the phrase "four winds of heaven" and "the ends of the earth" and the "ends of heaven" mean the furthest parts of the world. Like, the ends of the planet, the entire globe.

Turn to Deut. 30:1-10. This is Moses in the Law finishing a section about how if Israel sinned and didn't repent God would haul them out of the Promised Land and scatter them to the four winds of heaven.

Deut. 28:64: And the Lord will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other. God's judgment was to haul his people as far away from the Promised Land as you could go. And he did that when Israel was exiled in Babylon.

If you remember, after David and Solomon, the Kingdom was divided into Israel in the north, and Judah in the south. After several hundred years the sin was so great in Israel that God sent the Assyrians to destroy the northern Kingdom of Israel. They hauled the Jews out of the land and they never came back.

Judah in the south lasted a little longer but eventually God sent the Babylonians in to destroy Jerusalem and take what was left of the people back to Babylon. In Babylon the Jews were know as exiles. They were God's people but they were 500 miles east of their Promised Land.

Well, also in the Law, in **Deut. 30:4** God promised if his people fell into sin, he would gather them back if they repented. **Read 1-10**

Now, we're not under the OC so this doesn't apply to us directly. But what we see here is what that language means. When God says he will gather from the ends of heaven and earth what he means is he will rescue his people from all over the planet. God can save his people wherever they are.

And so what Jesus seems to be saying is that once Jerusalem is gone, he will go to utter ends of the earth to gather up his people, circumcise their heart and bless them all across the planet.

And the promise of blessing is no longer to just Israel, but to Jews and Gentiles alike. God will gather his elect people from all over the planet.

The other verse Jesus seems to be using here is **Zech 2:10-11** and the context is similar. God is talking to Israel while they are in captivity in Babylon. And Zechariah has a vision of an angel - that's interesting. And in the midst of the vision God says to Israel "I have spread you abroad as the four winds of the heavens...Sing and rejoice o daughter of Zion, for I will come and dwell in your midst. And many nations shall join themselves to the Lord in that day, and shall be my people."

So **back in Mark 13** when Jesus says the gospel will be preached to all nations or world - oikoumene - before Jerusalem is destroyed he means it will be preached to Rome. But after Jerusalem is destroyed, the gospel will spread to the whole planet - the ends of heaven and earth - and gather his elect.

Now what about the angels? **Read 27**

What's that about? Well, one way to translate "angel" is "messenger." That's a legitimate way to translate the word. So it could mean that messengers are sent out to preach the gospel to gather in the elect; we'd call them missionaries.

Another option is to simply understand it as actual angels. And I think it could go either way. After all, angels are ministering spirits to the saints, and very likely have some role in the spiritual world of the gospel being preached. Hebrews says we've probably even bumped into angels and we don't even know it.

Either way - it's not critical - God is blessing his people who are outside of Israel and outside of the Roman world.

And actually, the NT writers pick up on this idea and begin calling Christians "exiles." The gospel has come to them outside the Promised Land.

1 Pet 1:1-4 calls Christians "elect exiles" in Pontius, Galatia, Cappadocia - and we know he's talking to Gentiles because later on in the book he says they were once not a people. God was gathering his elect exiles.

James 1:1 does the same thing: He refers to the Christian church as the 12 tribes of the dispersion.

That's the theology and the biblical terminology.

Here's the reality: this is actually what happened when Jerusalem fell. Once Jerusalem fell, Jerusalem specifically was no longer a focal point for the followers of Christ, Jew or Gentile. Jerusalem is great to visit, but it's of zero importance to our walk as believers which is completely contrary to the OT where the city itself was central.

So Jesus uses language from the OT to tell us:

- 1) **24-25:** When Jerusalem is destroyed, spiritual and political realities will change forever.
- 2) **26:** When Jerusalem is destroyed, that will confirm Jesus is reigning as the Son of God in heaven.
- 3) **27:** When Jerusalem is destroyed, the gospel will go out into all the globe.

Okay, what about these parables? There are 2 parables: the fig tree and the watchman. And both are answering the question the disciples asked.

The point of the first parable is that sign is crucial to understanding when the Jerusalem is about to be destroyed.

The point of the second parable is the disciples have to watch for the sign.

So let's look at Parable 1. **Read 28-31**

Let me just tell you what I think he's saying here and then we'll break it down.

I think Jesus is saying when you see the non-signs - wars and rumors of wars, the persecution, earthquakes, and things that will just be the normal part of Christian life in the first century - and then you see the abomination of desolation (the Roman armies coming for Jerusalem), know that Jerusalem is about to be destroyed.

Now, if you are a grammar Nazi this is where the Bible can often drive you nuts. Most of the difficulties in this parable have to do with pronouns. You thought pronouns were confusing in our day, well, they've always been tricky. Let's walk through it.

The parable is of fig tree. Remember this is Tuesday and we've already seen a fig tree on Tuesday at the very beginning of the day. What happened to the fig tree? It was cursed. Jesus actually cursed it on Monday and by Tuesday morning it was completely withered as though it had been dead 15 years. Who did the fig tree represent? Israel. In the OT Israel was often likened to a fig tree and this cursing miracle showed the anger of Jesus toward Israel.

Well now we have another fig tree. I think Jesus wants us to keep in mind the cursing that's going to happen. But here the illustration is simple. When a fig tree gets leaves, summer is about to happen. That's the whole point. Leaves are a sign that summer is near.

Fig leaves in Israel begin forming in March or April, the summer harvest is in May or June. So the transition is very fast. And that's the point of the parable. When you see leaves, summer is about to happen.

Here's the hard part: what is Jesus connecting this to? **Read 29**

So what are the things happening and who's at the door? I think the "all these things" are all the non-sign events plus the appearance of the abomination which is the Roman army and is the one for-sure sign they are to look for.

When you couple the day to day situation of Christians in the first century and then you see Roman soldiers marching across the Jezreel Valley, desolation and destruction is here. I think it's the same warning as parable the Jesus gave in **Vss. 14-23**: run, flee, do not turn back, do not go into the city.

ESV says know that **he** is near, at the gates.

NIV says **it** is near, right at the door.

Is it "he" or is it "it?" Because maybe it's Jesus or maybe the abomination or some other thing. Well, the Greek doesn't help us because the pronoun "he" or "it" is implied. So basically what happens is however you understand **Vss. 14-23** is how you'll understand whatever is near.

Here I think the key is understanding that Jesus is just packaging what he already taught into a parable. He often does this in the gospels. He'll teach something, and then solidify it with a parable. He uses illustrations. And here the parable tells us that the sign is key.

Does Jesus give us any idea when this sign might happen? **Read 30-31**

Now I've probably quoted this verse, I don't know, a hundred times in these sermons. Why is this verse so important?

Because this verse gives us a general timeline of when these things are going to take place. Jesus says "this generation will not pass away until **all these** things take place."

Now, on just a plain reading I think this one verse is the most convincing argument for the partial preterist view. Jesus simply says everything that he has just talked about will happen within their generation.

There are people who want to make “this generation” mean anything other than the plain meaning. They’ll say it’s the generation that is alive at the second coming or the rapture, like Jesus is saying “that generation.” But that’s a different phrase. In Greek this is a near demonstrative pronoun; like *this pulpit* or *these chairs* or *this music stand*. Aute Genea.

A **far** demonstrative pronoun would be “that generation”: ekeina genea. Like “that mountain over there,” “that place down yonder.”

Now I got extra nerdy on this and actually printed out a handout of all the uses of “generation” - genea - in the NT. It’s used 61 times. And except when for the times it’s used in Matthew’s genealogy when it counts generations, it always, always means the generation of people Jesus is talking to. And it even means that in the epistles. And it’s no different here.

And yet the ESV Study Bible gives 5 options for the meaning and doesn’t actually choose one. It says it could be the race of Jews, or the race of Christians, or this could be the generation that’s alive when these signs begin to happen.

But the simple ordinary meaning of this word and this phrase is just this generation. This will all happen - every bit of what Jesus has said - will happen in their lifetime. What’s a generation: maybe 30-50 years. And all of this happened in one generation.

Maybe put a different way, what if Jerusalem wasn’t destroyed in the first century? What if it was 300AD or 1830? Would we actually say Jesus was accurate? Of course not. The context is about that city and the word plainly means those people.

I think this one verse eliminates the possibility that this is somehow a future event or ever referring to multiple fulfillments. All the things that Jesus has just predicted will be fulfilled in the lifespan of these people: 30-50 years.

One scholar said... “Of the thirty-eight appearances of genea apart from Luke 21:32//Matthew 24:34//Mark 13:30 all have the temporal meaning, primarily that of ‘contemporaries.’ (DeMar quoted in Sproul, Last Days According to Jesus)

And while I’m here I might as well fire some friendly shots: I think it’s ironic that the scholars who claim we have to take the “sun, moon and stars” as literal signs even though it’s never used in the Bible literally, they don’t take the phrase “this generation” literally even though it’s always used that way.

Jesus even doubles down on this saying that there is no possibility of this not happening. **Read 31**

This prophecy is bedrock. The universe would sooner disappear into nothingness, than Jerusalem not be destroyed in one generation. You can take this to the bank. So the sign is critical to knowing when this is about to happen.

Here’s the second parable: The watchman. They need to be sure to be watching for the sign. **Read 32-37**

Okay, what day does Jesus have in mind? The day of Jerusalem’s destruction, which the sign will indicate. The day the armies of Rome march into town to begin the siege.

Remember the disciples asked Jesus just 2 questions. **Read 4**

He gave them the sign. Here’s the timeline: One generation. And that’s the most information he is going to give them.

They won’t know the day or the hour. That’s why Jesus says pray it’s not in winter when the abomination comes. Pray that your wife isn’t pregnant or nursing in those days when you run to the mountains of Judea.

I mean, if they could get an exact date that would save a lot of trouble. "It'll be March of 67 when the armies come; it'll be partly cloudy with a chance of rain. You should probably just wear that extra cloak that day so you don't have to go back inside. And also, you should probably practice the rhythm method for a year or so so you don't have a little one when you're running."

No, Jesus doesn't say that. He says one generation, that's closest they get.

And amazingly, he says he doesn't know the day or hour. What's up with that? I thought Jesus was God? I thought he knew everything. Angels, okay, they don't know. But Jesus, how's that possible?

Well, we've already wrestled with this a little. Jesus two natures - human and divine. He is fully human and fully divine in one person. This is where it's hard for us to wrap our minds around the God-Man.

But Jesus is omniscient in his divine nature. He knows all things and is all powerful and everywhere present. But he is limited in his human nature. So he gets hungry and sleepy and learns things.

How does that all work out? How is it that the infinite second person of the Trinity is contained in human flesh? We don't know, that's the mystery of the incarnation. But he didn't know the day or hour. God revealed to him the general timeline, not specifics.

Obviously Jesus knows now when it happened. But exact timing of the fall of Jerusalem was not known to the Son while he was on earth. The most he knew at this time was that it would happen in that generation.

And so the parable he gives urges them to be on the lookout for the sign that this will happen. **Read 34-37**

Now, some people think this is maybe where Jesus begins talking about his second coming. They might grant that everything up to this point is the destruction in 70AD but here he seems to transition.

But I think it's the same because the warnings to look out are the exact same and I think it illustrates Jesus's point that they have a general timeline about the destruction of Jerusalem, but not specifics.

I worked a couple of corporate retail jobs when I was in high school and college and in both places, once a quarter, we would get a visit from the corporate office to inspect our store. And they'd tell the store manager what week they were coming but never the day or time. And so naturally everyone was on high alert for the whole week, everything was spotless because the last thing you wanted was to have your area in shambles when the head honchos rolled in. You had to be ready.

I think that's the point of this parable. If you were a manager of a house and you knew your master was gone for a journey - maybe he went to Rome for business - you could probably estimate when he'd return. Maybe 4 months to travel one way, be there a few months, and then four months back - give or take a little.

But if you're managing the place you need to be ready for him to come back at any time. The guy who is in charge of the door doesn't want to lock the owner out so you need to make sure someone is vigilant at all times.

Be on your guard Jesus says. That's actually what he said in **Vs. 23 Read**

So all that to say, Jesus tells them a general timeline when Jerusalem will be destroyed - this generation - but he gives no specifics on day or hour. And since there are no specifics, they need to be very careful to watch for the sign of the abomination of desolation which Luke plainly says are the Roman armies.

Let me leave you with one application: What God's Word says, we can trust. **Read 31**

The words of Jesus - which is the whole Word of God - is to be trusted and obeyed.

If Jesus says divorce is bad, we don't get divorced.

If Jesus says don't co-sign loans, we don't co sign.
If Jesus says feed your enemies, we feed our enemies.
If Jesus says do church discipline, we do church discipline.
If Jesus says dress modestly, we dress modestly.
If Jesus says Jerusalem will be destroyed, it will be destroyed.

We serve a God who is whole-heartedly trustworthy and will never lead us astray with his Words.

Pray