

The King is coming

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[0 : 0 0] Well, when I was training for ministry a long time ago, I spent two summers on the Isle of Arran. Now, Arran is sometimes known as Scotland in miniature because it is a beautiful island, but it's small and basically nothing ever happens there very much at all.

But one day something big did happen and the day was the 9th of August 1997. 9th of August 1997. And I was there on that day.

And that day was such a big deal for the Isle of Arran. And here's why. It was the day when Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II would visit Arran. And it was actually the final voyage of her royal yacht Britannia just before it was decommissioned.

And so the Queen and her royal party were all welcomed to the Isle of Arran. I was there. They attended the Highland Games and they visited Brodick Castle. And the Queen opened the Isle of Arran Distillery Visitor Centre.

And so the population of the island multiplied for the day of her arrival. All three roads on the island were busy. There were more cars than sheep for a change.

[1 : 0 7] And so when I arrived for the summer, the first question I was asked was, do you know that the Queen is coming to Arran? And then that was the question that was asked in every conversation, on every occasion, until she arrived.

And after she had been and gone, the question was, did you see the Queen? And I did. I was about six feet away from her. I'm sure I made a big impact on her visit when she saw me.

But here's the thing. The people of the Isle of Arran were ready for her arrival. The date had been set. And so everybody on the island got ready and was prepared for her coming.

Now, what our Bible reading from Mark chapter 13 tells us is that, essentially, the King is coming. I don't mean King Charles, of course. But King Jesus is coming in the future.

And we don't know when he is coming, but we must be ready for him. And that's really what this Bible text is telling us. Because it is complex, but it's saying to us, we've got to be ready for Jesus when he comes again.

[2 : 1 5] Because a crucial part of Christianity, and if you're new to Christianity and don't know much about it, a vital part of it is the second coming of Jesus. Jesus came once, the first time, but he will come a second time.

He will come again. He will return. And when he does return, he will return as judge. And so that's why we've got to be ready for his coming. Because the reality of his coming in the future has got to affect how we live our lives at the present time, right now, today, tomorrow, next week.

And so Jesus here in this passage teaches on the future. Mark 13 is all about the future. There's a slight twist to it. And so we're going to ask two simple questions as we look at this difficult passage. The questions are, what? What is Jesus talking about? And then, so what? What does it mean for us? So let's look first at what? What is Jesus talking about?

And then, so what? What does it mean for us? Well, the context for Mark chapter 13 is the temple. If you've been with us looking at Mark's gospel together, chapter 11 and chapter 12, the focus is all on the temple.

[3 : 2 9] That's where all the action has taken place. Jesus has clashed with the religious teachers and leaders of the day. But now, chapter 13, Jesus departs from the temple never to return again.

And so let's just look at that in verse 1 to verse 4. As Jesus was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him, Look, teacher, what massive stones, what magnificent buildings.

Do you see all these great buildings? Reply Jesus. Not one stone here will be left on another. Every one will be thrown down. As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately, Tell us, when will these things happen?

And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled? Now, the temple was a wonderful building, but Jesus says temple will be destroyed.

The magnificent stones of the temple will come crashing down. And so Jesus here is promising judgment on the temple and on all the false, fruitless religion that the temple signifies.

[4 : 45] And so as Jesus sits opposite the temple on the Mount of Olives with his disciples, they're asking him, When is this going to happen? What is the sign of the temple's destruction?

And so in response to their question, Jesus says, What is going to happen? There will be a judgment that marks the end of the temple. And that's what some of this chapter is about.

But there is also going to be a judgment that marks the end of the world. And that's what the rest of this chapter is about. So Jesus has got two ends in sight here.

And this is why this is a difficult passage to understand. Because while Jesus is talking about the future, he's clearly talking about the future in two separate parts.

He's talking about the destruction of the temple. So he's talking about the end of the temple. But he's also talking about his return. He's talking about the end of the world.

[5 : 46] And so the difficulty comes in working out what verses refer to the destruction of the temple, the end of the temple, and what verses refer to his return. The end of the world.

Because as Jesus speaks about the future, future for him and his disciples, he interweaves these two events together. The near future and the distant future.

Both are in view in what Jesus says here. Now, if that sounds confusing, it's a confusing chapter, just try and frame Mark 13 the way that you would view a mountain range.

So you pull up in your car at the bottom of the hills, you look up and you see all of these peaks in the future, sorry, in the distance, you can see them.

And you know that some peaks, though on the horizon, they all look the same distance and length away. There are some that are closer and some that are further away than others.

[6 : 45] And so as we look at Mark chapter 13, it's like there are two mountain peaks in view. One of them is the destruction of the temple, which is the one we come to first.

And then the other is the return of Jesus. And it comes later. It's further into the future. And so we need to try and keep both of these on the horizon as we understand what is going on here in Mark chapter 13.

So let's look at the near future first, the first mountain peak, because Jesus is speaking about events in this chapter that would soon take place to the time when he spoke about them.

And so I suggest that this is what's spoken about in verse five through to verse 23. Jesus is talking here about the near future and the destruction of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple.

So what Jesus says in these verses, five to 23, I suggest that all of these things have already been fulfilled. They have happened. So we've gone past that first mountain peak, as it were.

[7 : 55] It's happened. So what's described here for Jesus and his disciples was in the near future, but for us it's in past ancient history. So why does Jesus tell them what is going to happen in the future?

Well, the reason is because he wants them to be ready. Look down at verse 23. He says, So be on your guard. I have told you everything in advance. So along with the destruction of the temple, he's saying terrible persecution is coming for God's people.

So he says, verse five to six, don't be deceived. That's what that's about. Verse seven to eight, he says, don't be dismayed. Speaks about birth pains.

Birth pains start when a woman is going to have a baby. They indicate the birth is coming, but not how long it will be before the baby is born. And so Jesus' disciples shouldn't be alarmed when all of this happens.

And then in verse nine to 13, he's saying, don't be discouraged. So he wants his disciples to be on their guard because these things would soon happen in their lifetimes.

[9 : 05] But they had to continue, he says, to preach the gospel to all nations. Verse 10. So this is a warning that persecution is coming for his people.

Now the disciples, remember earlier, asked for a sign, verse four. And he's saying, all of this is a sign that things are going to get worse.

So Jesus says, verse 14, when you see the abomination that causes desolation, standing where it does not belong, let the reader understand. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.

Now he's talking about Judea. So he's saying people will flee to Judea, meaning that these things have happened. These things don't apply to us. But what is the abomination that causes desolation?

In the Old Testament part of the Bible, in the book of Daniel, this is a phrase that's mentioned a few times. And it describes, essentially, intense persecution for God's people.

[10:07] The abomination that causes desolation is a way of saying things are going to be really hard, in fact, horrific for the people of God. Now in Daniel, that refers to the desecration of the temple in 168 BC by a man called Antiochus IV Epiphanes, a figure of history.

It was a time of horrendous persecution for the people of God. Apparently, Antiochus IV Epiphanes destroyed the Torah scrolls, part of the Old Testament scriptures.

He set up an altar to Zeus in the temple, and he sacrificed pigs on it. And that's the abomination of desolation. Now here, Jesus is saying there's another abomination that causes desolation.

That will take place. And it did. And it's happened. So about 40 years after Jesus spoke these words in Mark chapter 13, they were literally fulfilled.

So it was the near future for those listening to Jesus. But it's ancient history for us. And it's all recorded by Josephus, the Jewish historian. Because it was the Roman general Titus who besieged Jerusalem in AD 70, and he burnt, and he destroyed the temple.

[11:26] And apparently, somewhere in the region of one million Jews were killed or died in famine. And it was horrendous. And so, essentially, what is there in verse 5 to 23, all of that has been fulfilled.

Jesus predicted judgment on the temple, and it happened. And yet, that is not the only judgment in this chapter. Because while the judgment on the temple has already happened, Jesus says the judgment on the world has yet to come.

And it will come when Jesus returns. So what Jesus says about the end of the temple, in a sense, foreshadows the end of the world. So the judgment on the temple is pointing to the judgment on this world.

It's like a trailer for the main event, the main movie, which is to come. And it will happen when Jesus returns. So, in a sense, come the end of verse 23 and on into verse 24 in the passage, we've passed one mountain peak, and now we're looking towards the other, greater, bigger mountain peak in the future.

And that's where we're heading. And that's why these words weren't just for Jesus' disciples at the time. That's why these are words for us. Because they speak about things that are yet to happen in the future.

[12:49] They're for everyone. And so the dominant focus in the rest of chapter 13, 24 onwards, is on the second coming of Jesus. So let's look at what these verses say about that, verse 24 to 27, first of all.

But in those days, in those days, following that distress, the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light. The stars will fall from the sky and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.

At that time, people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.

Jesus is talking about the end of the world when he will return and judge. And so this is on the horizon for all of us.

And so while the language about the judgment and the destruction of the temple earlier is meant to disturb us, it was meant to disturb the disciples, it can hardly compare to what it will be like when the sun is darkened and when the stars fall from the sky and when the heavens shake.

[14:04] That is coming. The judgment will be far more terrifying for this world and for us than anything that has happened before.

And so Jesus is warning us of this. Why? So that we can be ready and prepared for it. So there's a lesson to be learned from the past in order to be ready for the future.

And this is what Jesus is saying in verse 28 to 31. So let me read those verses again. Now learn this lesson from the fig tree. As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near.

Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near right at the door. Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.

Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. So again, here Jesus seems to be referring back again to the destruction of the temple because when he says to those he's speaking to, when you see these things happening, he's presumably talking about these things, the persecution and then the end of the temple.

[15 : 18] And Jesus also says, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened, meaning these things would happen within the lifetime of the people he's speaking to.

because the destruction of the temple in judgment did happen within a generation of Jesus saying these words. And so what does Jesus mean about the lesson from the fig tree?

Well, as soon as its leaves come out on the tree, you know that summer is coming. It's nature's way, God's way of saying this is the time for fruit.

As soon as the leaves come out, summer is coming and so the fruit will come. The sign shows you what is going to happen next. And so too, the judgment on the temple is a sign showing what is going to happen next.

What is next? What is next is the judgment on the world. And that's why the end of the temple judgment and the end of the world judgment are so closely interwoven by Jesus because both of these events are preceded by a sign.

[16 : 30] So the birth pains and the abomination that causes desolation, they were signs indicating the temple will be judged. But now the actual destruction of the temple is a sign saying there's a future judgment to come.

That's happened, so this will happen. You've seen that, now be ready for this. And so if we ever doubt or think God's judgment is some kind of fairyland idea, it's never going to happen, you don't need to worry about it.

We just need to look back to what Jesus said about the destruction of the temple and all of that being fulfilled to realize that when Jesus says something is going to happen, then guess what? It will happen. We can be certain and sure about that. And so Jesus isn't messing about here. He is preparing his disciples and he is preparing us by saying on the horizon there is a great judgment to come and we must all face it.

And so everything Jesus foretold has been fulfilled, it's come to pass, and so we can trust that when Jesus speaks of his return and the judgment, then that's going to happen too.

[17 : 46] He will follow through on his promise of judgment because when Jesus Christ returns, that is the next big thing that God is going to do, the return of Jesus and then the judgment.

And he will come in all his glory as judge. But unlike the signs indicating that the destruction of the temple would happen, there's no warning for when Jesus will return as judge.

And so that's why the message of this whole chapter is be ready because Jesus is coming again.

And that's really the force of Jesus' closing words at the end of our chapter, verse 32 to 37.

So we're moving from what, what's Jesus talking about, onto so what, what does it mean for us? Jesus tells us what this means for us in verse 32 to 37.

So let me read those verses again. But about that day or hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven nor the sun, but only the father. Be on your guard, be alert, you do not know when that time will come.

[18 : 55] It is like a man going away, he leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch. Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back, whether in the evening or at midnight or when the cock crows or at dawn.

If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone, watch. So this is what we should do, whether we would call ourselves a Christian believer or not.

Jesus' word should wake us up so that we are ready for his coming. And so when Jesus speaks about that day or hour in verse 32 or that time in verse 33, he is talking about his return.

That's why there's a need to be ready as he says, be on guard, be alert, keep watch, and watch. And so let's just think about three aspects, three aspects of the return of Jesus and how what is going to happen in the future should impact your life and my life right now.

So the three things are, first, God controls the future. That's during verse 32. This is the clear implication of everything that Jesus has said. God controls the future.

[20 : 20] Jesus predicted the destruction of the temple with absolute accuracy and so we can be sure that his future return is also certain.

That's why world history is not some kind of series of random events where we don't know what is happening or where things are going and why we should understand the signs that God gives because the signs that God gives which we find here in his word they're like his megaphone to wake up a human race that is asleep.

Jesus wants us to wake up to the reality of his return because when he comes back the whole world must face his judgment and so God right now is moving world history towards that day when Jesus Christ will return and so God's control over the future should be a tremendous comfort for every believer in Jesus Christ.

It means that we must continue our witness to Jesus with the help of the Holy Spirit despite facing persecution and we will increasingly.

We shouldn't be deceived or dismayed or discouraged but keep going because God controls the future and yet the fact that Jesus will return should also be a warning for anyone who doesn't believe in Jesus because when Jesus returns we'll all face his judgment and so there's an urgency about submitting ourselves to Jesus the King before time runs out because one day time will run out.

[22 : 05] So God controls the future that's the first thing. The second thing is Jesus' return is unknown so verse 33 is saying so Jesus said the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple would happen in a generation and it did and yet Jesus doesn't give any indication of when he will return and yet we have been given warning that it will happen.

God the Father has got the date marked in his calendar and only he knows when it will take place. Even Jesus said he didn't know and so trying to figure out when Jesus will return is a futile exercise. Many people have tried and they have failed but we don't know and we can't know and that's why Jesus uses the illustration of a homeowner and his servants just to highlight the unexpected nature of his return.

But while we don't know the day or the hour of his return that doesn't mean that we shouldn't be ready for his return. And so that's the third thing.

First God controls the future. Second Jesus return is unknown but third be ready. Verse 37 That should be our response to everything Jesus says here in Mark chapter 13 because Jesus is not just talking to his disciples as he says all of this he's talking to every single one of us.

[23 : 29] 37 says what I say to you his disciples I say to everyone all of us watch we must be vigilant and we must be ready for Jesus return.

And again the illustration of a homeowner and his servants explains what this means. Jesus says in verse 36 if he comes suddenly do not let him find you sleeping.

So the servants needed to be about their master's business on duty doing their jobs so that they're ready if their master comes back suddenly. And so Jesus wants to find his people on the job as it were being a faithful disciple following Jesus every single day living for him speaking for him being involved in his mission in this world.

So that if he returns suddenly we're ready we're ready because we're doing what we're supposed to be doing if we follow him. John Wesley who was a minister and he and his brother Charles Wesley who wrote lots of hymns they were the founders of Methodism.

Now apparently Wesley was asked by a woman how he would spend tomorrow if he knew Jesus was going to return. And Wesley how madam he replied why just as I intend to spend it now.

[24 : 54] I should preach this night at Gloucester and again at five tomorrow morning. After that I should ride to Tweeksbury preach in the afternoon and meet the societies in the evening. I should then repair to friend Martin's house who expects to entertain me converse and pray with the family as usual.

Retire to my room at ten o'clock commend myself to my heavenly father lie down to rest and wake up in glory. In other words when Wesley was asked what would you do if Jesus was coming back tomorrow?

What did he do? He looked at his diary and he said I would simply get on with the work that God has given me to do. That's how I'd be ready. And isn't that how we should be ready for the coming of Jesus?

Not trying to figure out when he might come back but by faithfully living for him right now. like today and tomorrow and the next day and the next day and the next day because we can waste our lives if we live them for ourselves instead of living them for Jesus.

But we can be ready for the coming of Jesus if we serve him today in whatever he has called us to do. and if we keep serving him today and tomorrow and the next day and the next day what is going to happen is that one day Jesus will return and we'll see him.

[26 : 21] He'll come in the clouds with power and glory and it will be an awesome day. And yet we have nothing to fear for that day or on that day when we know him.

And yet if we don't know him then we have everything to fear because when he returns as judge all humanity will be divided in two.

We read here verse 27 God's chosen people his elect will be gathered from the ends of the earth to dwell in his presence forever whereas those who aren't God's people will be punished with everlasting destruction.

And so the day of judgment will be a terrifying dreadful day. And so the question is as we close are you ready for the second coming of Jesus?

The reason Jesus came first time was so that we could avoid the judgment that we all deserve. And we deserve God's judgment for the way that we've treated him as our loving creator.

[27 : 33] How can we avoid God's judgment? Well because Jesus came to take it in our place. Because as Jesus spoke these very words in Mark chapter 13 we read about Jesus going to the cross in Mark chapter 15.

And it's amazing because the king who will one day come with great power and glory came to die in weakness and shame. God's judgment fell on Jesus so that it would be our sin which deserves to be punished so that we can be forgiven.

And you notice that we read verse 24 how the sun will be darkened when Jesus comes to judge. But you know the sun was also darkened when Jesus died on the cross.

God's judgment fell on Jesus so that it need never fall on us. And so we can only be ready for that day, the day of judgment if we know Jesus as our Savior today.

We don't know when Jesus will come but we must be prepared for it. Either by following him now every day in every way or by turning from our sin and trusting in him as our Savior.

[28 : 57] Knowing him as our Savior before we meet him as our judge. Thank you.