

No Turning Back

Living the surrendered life
Lesson 16

Be Ready!
Mark 13:1-31

Have you ever felt like your world was over?

I have had times like this in school. One of my undergraduate classes in the Pentateuch is a good example. Just the word PENTATEUCH was scary enough. We were exposed to a professor who had this huge reputation of being brilliant and tough. Consistently he warned about the difficulty of his midterm exams. He always strongly encouraged us to be ready--to keep watch. Sometimes just being in this guy's class made you feel like your world was over.

The day finally came and he announced--tomorrow we have the big exam! Oh man... what a tough night that was. I thought my world was over!

Read Mark 13:13-31

Imagine this for a moment... You travel to Washington D.C. for a vacation and you join a tour group. The guide takes you around the city and shows you all the famous buildings. But at each stop, he says the same thing:

"See the Lincoln monument over there? That will be gone shortly."

"Look over there at the Jefferson memorial...that will be gone too."

"Oh, and the capital building and the White House...those won't be around for long either"

How would you like to be on that tour and have that guide? Not a lot of fun.

The disciples are walking along with Jesus as they admire the buildings in Jerusalem, and specifically the Temple. All of a sudden Jesus is like that tour guide.

"See that monument over there, it will be gone shortly."

"Look over there at the Temple. Done away with."

"Your world is over."

A line like that is the reason you never let a prophet be a tour guide. And your tour guide at the Temple is Jesus.

Your world is over because the Temple is over. Your world is over because the Temple is gone!
Burned to the ground.

- All of a sudden you understand that the locale of your faith is no more. Say goodbye.
- All of a sudden every place you see, every place you try to localize and call faith is now a pile of rubble.
- All of a sudden everything you have used to show other people your faith is now a smoldering pile of ashes.

Now what do you do? What do you do when what you put your confidence in is now gone?

How disturbing. The Temple in Mark 13 reminds us of how Israel's faith from generation to generation eventually came down to the Temple, the dwelling place of God. Though still in construction during Jesus' day, the temple had the reputation of being the most beautiful building in the whole world. It was certainly the largest structure for hundreds of miles around Jerusalem. Now Jesus comes along and predicts that the whole thing will be destroyed. It will be destroyed because the people have failed to let the Temple be a welcoming place for the presence of the Lord. God has been pushed aside long enough, but no more!

The Temple is in trouble! Those who are in earshot of Jesus must have had some effect on their faith. Perhaps faith is not about location. Perhaps faith is about following God, whether the Temple stands, or whether it smolders.

Historically we know what happened in Jerusalem from AD 66-70. The destruction of the Temple happens sometime after Mark writes his gospel account. The destruction of the Temple is not just because the Romans were strolling about, or that the Jewish zealots were turning a house of prayer into a staging place for war--as significantly wrong as this is. The destruction is really about the owner of the vineyard not being happy, not only because of what they did to his servants and his son, but because of what they are doing to his vineyard! And because of Mark's warning to the "reader" that we may understand (v. 14) Jesus' words are not to an ancient audience, but to us, and all who read. Jesus telling us to understand flies in the face of everyone in Mark 1-12 because they continued to fail to understand.

Jesus' message for us today is to stand firm, not only because the Son of Man will come again, but because the Son of Man has come-- just as the book of Daniel promised us.

Dan. 7:13 "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a **son of man**, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence.

Are you ready? Responding to what God wants is never easy.

"The real joy of our walk with Christ comes when we begin to press against the edge of our comfort zone." -Bill Nix

I can't guarantee much, but I can guarantee this--we cannot be what God wants us to be while insisting to stay in our comfort zone. -Scot Poirier

When the Son of Man comes he should find you seeking the lost, welcoming all who long for the presence of the Ancient of Days. **That'll challenge and that'll preach!!**

If the Son of Man does not find you active in this work, if he does not find you on watch, watch out!

This is Mark's great commission text--not at the end when everything is settled, but in the middle of turmoil, for that is where we live. If we only see this narrative to be about Peter, James and John--plus one (Andrew) we'll miss what Jesus wants us to know. And what Jesus wants us to know is that "the reader," you and me, are in the thick of the story. So as we read this story today, we must ask, "what is our life like, the life of the "reader"?"

"If you had permission to do what you really want to do, what would you do? Don't ask how, that will cut your desire off at the knees. How is never the right question; how is a faithless question.

It means "unless I can see my way clearly I won't believe it, won't venture forth." John Elderidge

We live in a world of trouble. We turn on the news and see the earth crumbling, fire ravaging the land, wind toppling structures. We hear tragic stories of families turning against one another. We experience terror alerts, words like "defcon", and people bent on war. There are earthquakes and famines.

And as we read Mark 13, we can easily feel helpless, which is part of the point. We realize that there's only one solution--that God is the only one able to fix this! **The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it (1 Cor. 10:26).** And He has a mess on His hands.

We hear Jesus say that we need to endure to the end (v. 13), because a people who will not endure are ill suited for the mission of God. Here's something worthwhile to consider:

- A church more concerned with itself than the world will devolve into little more than a self-interest club.
 - A community of the people of God that only looks inward and neither looks upward nor outward is malnourished for the task of joining God in redeeming all of creation.
- We must endure. We must stand firm and put our faith in the right place--in God!

I like what Dr. Paul Clark has to say about this. He says we tend to surround ourselves in the structures of Friends, Family, Finances and Faith.

For many of us our **friendship support** is homogeneous and we find our acceptance here.

For many of us our **family system** is made up of the functional and the dysfunctional and we gain our identity through this system.

For many of us our **financial stability** has everything to do with our work, vacations, retirement, leisure time and we find our worth here.

For many of us our **faith structure** is where we agree about what to believe and how to move and act religiously.

Here's a problem: We have a tendency to build all kinds of structures in our lives. And we can easily allow ourselves to be at the center of things. But these structures can all be destroyed in an instance.

So perhaps I do have it right though--faith is not about location. Perhaps faith is about following God, whether our temple stands, or whether it smolders. Perhaps we can place too much confidence and too much of our identity in a structure or an ideology.

The New Testament is fairly clear on the Temple of God. We are the temple. We are God's dwelling place. But we are still trapped in the world of Mark 13. We can still fall into the trap that thinks a Christian government, or a Christian nation, or a Christian media are the answer for our troubles. But in the light of Mark 13, it just looks like another temple. The trouble with Israel in the original hearing of this text is that they had all those things: They had the temple, they had a government ruled by priests, and a monetary system based on their religion. And Jesus walks in and says, "Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down."

Consider this humbling thought from Richard Foster- "**when we pass from thinking of God as part of our life to the realization that we are part of HIS life.**" We can be used by God in this troubled world.

What if the Gospel of Mark in a very dark hour is reminding us to speak the words of Christ? How many of us here could not benefit from a specific goal this year to use language of blessing in our homes, at work, in our friendships, and even at church? What would the world look like if this morning we decided to go out into the world with words that seek to bless those we meet with the blessings of Christ? What if we join one another to pray that the Holy Spirit of God seasons our language with the language of blessing? What if we met every waitress, every person who helps us at the store with words like, "I know it's your job to serve me, but I really appreciate your help."

In the midst of desolation we are called to do more than understand Mark 13; we are called to live, to be on guard, and to learn a lesson from a fig tree (vv.27-31).

God assures us that everything we call home will pass away, but the God who speaks lives out a word before us that will never die. You can't get out of Mark 13 and not hear that this is all temporary.

-Braveheart... All men die, it's just a matter of why and how.

Jesus speaks a Word of hope in a time of desolation (vv. 26-27). Hear the good news of these words; because if you hear this today, you hear words meant for those closest to the Lord.

As disciples--we look beyond to a much greater kingdom. Behold He comes, riding on the clouds. Jesus warns the listeners of the text--and that includes us--to be alert, be ready, stay awake, to not fade away.

Speaking about being ready, let me finish my story about that brilliant and tough professor. I worked hard in his class, but tonight was the only other time I had left to be sure I was prepared. So... I worked hard that evening. Next day my professor passed out the exam and informed us that the first half of the exam was a freebee. Meaning we automatically aced the first part. Wow!! Wouldn't you like that? But I was unhappy. I approached my teacher after the class and asked him to help me to understand him better so that I could be more prepared for his class. Essentially he said--no! I was shocked and rather disappointed and he knew it. As I walked away from him he called me back and asked me to stop by his office the next day at 11:30am and that we could discuss this some more.

Next day at 11:30 I went into his office loaded for bear! I had my study notes showing him that I worked real hard on a bunch of stuff that he scared me into doing and then decided to not test us on.

I walked into his office--he smiled--I didn't. He asked if I had lunch yet-- I didn't but I also didn't want to have lunch with him. He asked me to go to lunch with him--on the outside I agreed but on the inside I'd rather be anywhere else but with him at lunch. We stood in line to get our food and he makes it known that he's paying for my lunch--I'm thinking no way... I want to stay mad so that I can state my case and prove him wrong. We sit down, thank God for the food and he gently smiles and asks, "What can I do for you?" I now am somewhat pacified and thinking that he's not that bad of a guy and begin to tell him how hard I worked in his class. After examining my notes and seeing what I did to prepare for his class, he smiled and said, "all I wanted you to do was to be ready, and it looks like you were ready."

The God who speaks lives out a word before us that will never die. God is always at work to remind us to watch for Him, to be on our guard and to be ready.

God is always at work to redeem His creation. (and we have been invited to be a part of this!)
God is always at work to call us beyond our dependence upon our own structures (because these structure will not last), speaking His life among us.
God is always at work to throw down the powers that be.
God is always at work to take a tragedy and redress it with the presence of those who care.
God is always at work to bring peace to a time of war.
God is always at work to say love, joy, and kindness.
God is always at work to expose that, which is false.
God is always at work to show, that which is true.
God is always at work to speak a word before us that will never die, a word that calls us to stand firm to the end.
God is always at work to live among us, even if heaven and earth pass away, because His Word lived in Christ will never pass away. God will not fade away...

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