

CLOSER THAN YESTERDAY**Mark 13****(Read Mark 13)**

Intro: This account was from the beginning of Holy Week. Jesus had made his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. He had, in many ways, upset the apple cart. He had cleared the Temple and his teaching had a new urgency. The disciples were feeling chesty as they anticipated their place in Jesus's new kingdom, and they were seeing everything, including Jerusalem, through rose colored glasses as they exclaimed, "*Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!*", Mark 13:1. Jesus, with a definite buzz-kill, shattered those glasses with, "*Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.*" Mark 13:2. And, of course, that brought questions. So, when they had crossed the little valley to the Mount of Olives, which overlooks the Temple and all those beautiful stone buildings that had so impressed them, the disciples asked Jesus what he meant by his sobering words and when it would all happen? True to form, Jesus didn't really answer their questions – but he did give them teaching that was intended not just for them but is for all Christ Followers for all time and that is why I just read the entire chapter to you.

We're just like the disciples – because, we ARE disciples. When crazy and mixed up events happen, we wonder what they all signify. The most ready question is, is this it?! Is this the end times? What will happen? When will it happen?

This is especially prone to happen when there are storms and earthquakes and volcanos blowing their tops AND huge and unsettling events in the Middle East. The past week with the horrific attacks on Israel and Israel's horrific response has us wondering, "Is this it?"

Six years ago, on Sunday, October 8, 2017, my friend Eric Villanueva preached a sermon entitled THE LAST DAYS and he began it like this, "Five hurricanes, another on the way, four earthquakes, almost a nuclear war just in the last month. The question people so often ask any pastor is, "*Are we in the last days? Is this the end times?*" *I have a sure and certain answer with no chance of error. This is the answer that is spot on. Today is certainly later than yesterday and the time we live in is ender than the time before it.*" And I cannot agree more. The end times are certainly closer than yesterday. The truth is, ever since Jesus returned to heaven and an angel told his gaping disciples, who were staring up into the clouds, that he would return in the same way, and we have been waiting with great anticipation for that to happen.

Even though I just read from Mark 13 that *no one knows that day or that hour*, Mark 13:22, and Jesus said another time, "*It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.*" Acts 1:7, an entire industry has grown up around predicting what Jesus clearly said cannot be predicted. It's barking up the wrong tree. Paul Minear, writes, "The true purpose of all biblical prophecy, which is not speculative but practical, is not to enable us to forecast the future but to interpret the present, not to satisfy your curiosity but to deliver from perplexity and to encourage watchfulness." It helps us be ready!

Now don't get me wrong, I understand wanting to be ready. Joel and Judy came to our house on Friday, and we wanted to be ready for them. It would be right inhospitable if we had not made their bed and cleaned the toilet in the guest bathroom. And the Apple Butter weekend we just had does not happen without major preparation. There are apples to be picked and tables to be set up, and the kettle needs to be scoured and firewood split and stacked. These and a gajillion other things need to be prepared in order to be ready.

But to be ready, we need to stay ready and that is what Jesus is telling us here. Knowing the day and hour is not for us, so we need to be ready because it's closer than yesterday.

We need to know that . . .

Stuff Happens

- We live in a fragile world. The idea of the temple being torn down was extremely distressing to the disciples. The background on my PowerPoint, is a photo of the crumbled stones at the base of the Temple Mount wall. Just look at the size of them. Some as big as 30 feet across. For the disciples it was mind boggling to think them as not one on top of the other. It was a picture of instability.
- Jesus tells them that it's not the stones of Jerusalem that need to hold it together, it's the people of God who need to hold it together—even when stuff happens. Calamities and strife are not necessarily to be taken as signs of the end, but rather they are the beginning of the sufferings.

- As that happens make sure that you are not led astray, and by all means, don't be alarmed. As Christ Followers, let's not base our hopes or our fears on external crisis because God's got this. Instead . . .

Our duty is to endure

- Jesus tells us to be on our guard. (v. 9). If the end of time is closer than yesterday, then be ready and be on guard. And it won't be easy. We were not promised a smooth ride. Jesus points out that suffering is what Christ Followers should expect. We are not promised a trouble free existence. One commentator correctly points out that our experience should not be expected to be easier than Christ's. In fact, he taught us that we have a cross to bear just as he did. That means we need to be ready.
- The disciples experienced this after Jesus returned to the Father as they were taken before the Sanhedrin and commanded to cease and desist from the teaching of the Good News. The disciple, James, whom I referred to in the dedication of Santi last week, was the first of the disciples to die when he refused to be quiet about the Risen Christ. Paul went before governors and kings and eventually, probably, Caesar himself. He never held back. The cloud of witnesses that have gone before us have done their part to carry out Jesus's command that *the gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations*, Mark 13:10 and now it's our time. What do we say? Jesus says, don't worry about it – the Holy Spirit can be relied upon at just the right time.
- We live in a crazy world where our message is not welcome. We will be hated but we respond with love and with the Good News of the one who so loved the world that he gave his only Son.
- Here is the promise – *the one who endures to the end will be saved*. Mark 13:13b. The end of what? The end of time? The end of our lives? The end of the latest tribulation? The answer is yes. Yes to all of them. Graham Swift writes, "*To endure to the end probably means not to the end of the age, as in verse 7, but to the uttermost, and endurance which is complete. Endurance therefore, is one of the keynotes of Christian life and witness in this age.*" We are called to endure, and to . . .

Watch!

- G. Campbell Morgan writes, "*Watch is literally to be wide awake and redeem the time. Make the best of it. Be eager and alert with hearts set upon the business of the kingdom.*" He goes on to say, and I love this, "*Our watching is first, the calm and resolute maintenance of our loyalty to our Lord and Master. It is secondly, that of courage of heart that is not troubled by wars and rumors of wars, and is not anxious, even in the hour of suffering. It is thirdly the prayer life, which is not forever seeking for the Second Coming of the Lord in order that we may escape from something; but that is ever seeking his Kingdom, his glory, and the accomplishment of his purpose.*"
- This is what we are called to do. Instead of beating our chests and worrying and fretting about the future, we need to be joyfully striving to carry out the Great Commission.
- Last week as I sat at Fiona's soccer game in a cold and damp wind and I found myself getting drowsy. That happens to me when I'm hunting – I get cold and I've come to the conclusion that my body's response is to sleep through it. Depression is also like that. The response is to sleep through the trouble and maybe it'll be gone when we wake up. But Jesus tells us to STAY AWAKE! Our job is to watch and be alert for the opportunity to be Jesus to people. The added bonus will be that we will be surprised by nothing and thanks to the work of the Holy Spirit we will be ready for everything.
- G. Campbell Morgan, puts it this way, "*None of the things happening in the world which surprise and startle me, surprise or startle God. None of these things—which I confess I am less able to explain today than yesterday, for the puzzle and wonder grow—were unknown to my Lord long ago.* God is not surprised or startled by what causes us to lose sleep. So, we are to be watchful and wide awake, but even when we, in our humanness, need to sleep, our God is watching. Fiona and Grady's favorite song from the past summer's VBS is GOD IS WATCHING OVER YOU, which ends with:

God is watching, watching over you,

24/7 watching over you

Your life is in His hands oh

How true it is!

Conclusion: Are we close to the end? Wow! It surely seems like it. Things are really crazy and it seems like it's only getting crazier. But the 1st century church could say the same thing. And when Islam was taking over the

known world in the 8th century, the church could say the same thing. And when the Black Death of bubonic plague killed over 50% of the population of Europe is sure seemed like the end times. And when the horror of World War One was grinding on, the future of the world looked grim and it couldn't get any worse, and then it did, with Hitler and Stalin and Mao and 150 – 200 million, at least, dead in World War Two and in the communist purges in the Soviet Union and China. Many of us remember the fear of the Cold War as the U.S. and the Soviets actually had a strategy of mutually assured destruction as they pointed their nuclear missiles at each other.

This abbreviated litany of awfulness I've just recited is not intended to frighten or depress us. NO! It's intended to show that God in his mercy is still on the throne and he is giving us time to be witnesses to the Good News. But we need to be about his business because the end of time and the return of Jesus *coming in clouds with great power and glory*. Mark 13:26, is closer than it was yesterday. Amen.

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem!