

Growing Deeper in Mark

MARK 13.1-37

VERSES 1-37: This chapter is known as the Olivet Discourse. It is a teaching Jesus gives on the Mount of Olives immediately after leaving the temple for the last time. The teaching is also recorded in Matthew 24-25 and Luke 21.5-36 if you want to read those accounts for greater context. As I have been reading and reading about this challenging teaching of Jesus, it seems to me that the key question we need to keep in mind is what event is Jesus teaching about, the destruction of the temple or his second coming?

As they are leaving the temple, Jesus prophesies that the temple will be destroyed, no stone left on another. When they get to the Mount of Olives the disciples ask, “when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?” Matthew puts the question this way, “when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming at the end of the age?” The disciples may have assumed these two events would occur at the same time. But we know from hindsight, that Jesus second coming did not coincide with the destruction of the temple which happened in AD 70. So, as we read the Olivet Discourse, we must discern when Jesus is answering the question “when will the temple be destroyed?” and when he is answering the question “what will be the signs of your return?”

VERSES 1-4: As they leave the temple, the disciples remark about how magnificent it is (and it truly was, no hometown bias here). But Jesus rocks their world by prophesying that it will be utterly destroyed. Jesus has already taught (through actions and parables) that the time of the sacrificial system has come to an end, but now he says the temple itself is doomed. The disciples recognize this as apocalyptic speech signaling the end of time and ask him about it when they are alone. When? What signs?

VERSES 5-8: Jesus begins with a warning about jumping to conclusions about the coming of the end of the age. There will be many who seek to deceive and there will be terrible things happen (wars, earthquakes, famines) but these are not signs of the end, but the beginnings of birth pains. Don't let these things fill you with fear.

VERSES 9-23: This section appears to deal with the disciples first question about when the temple would be destroyed. Jesus begins with an admonition to ‘be on your guard’ and he concludes with the same admonition in verse 23. He tells the disciples that they will face many difficulties. They will be tried in the local synagogues as well as by governors and kings so that they might be witnesses to them. When they are arrested, they are promised to be given the right words to say by the Holy Spirit. They should expect to be hated by many (even as Jesus was) even family, but they should not allow that to shake their faith. They should expect to see the temple desecrated, and when that happens, they should get out of Jerusalem quick. Jesus gives it to the disciples straight, they will go through ‘distress unequalled from the [creation].’ But he repeats the warning, do not be deceived by false Christs.

VERSE 24-27: Now Jesus addresses his second coming. This event will be one that needs no herald. Jesus will not be running around trying to convince people that he is the Christ, it will be apparent! There will be unmistakable cosmic events and Jesus will come ‘in the clouds in great power and glory.’ No mention of signs leading up to it just BAM! there he is.

VERSES 28-37: Jesus concludes by seeking to put our minds upon the truly important things. In the midst of wars, persecution, famine, and so forth, we are to remember the promises of God. Jesus is about to promise the disciples in the upper room ‘I will come back for you.’ We can count on it.

As the withered fig tree was a symbol of God judgement on the temple, now the tender twigs on the fig tree are a symbol of God's promise to make all things right in the end. Surely a good word to which the persecuted church will cling. ‘Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.’ “I will take you to be with me so that where I am you may be also”

But, Jesus does not want his followers to be consumed with the time of his return. He says no one knows(not even him), so stop trying to figure it out. Ultimately when matters not, only the certainty that he will come again. Rather we are to be keeping watch. We are to be attending to the responsibility he has charged us with, proclaiming the gospel to all nations.

When Jesus returns, what will he find you doing? What will he find going on at Faith Church? If today is the day, will he be pleased with what he finds?