

What Did Jesus Say About The End Of The World: Part 2

Mark 13:24-27

Introduction: 1) In the summer of 2011 I went to Romania to train pastors with my friend Marty Jacumin. After our initial teaching session we had a Q&A. The very first question fired in our direction was, "what did we think about a man named Harold Camping who had predicted that Christ would come again and the world would end on May 21, 2011." Now when the end did not come on that Saturday in May, Camping revised his prediction, saying the end would take place October 21, 2011. That day also came and went. Fortunately, Mr. Camping has acknowledged his error and says he is retiring from any future date setting. While some would say these are the musings of an old man out of touch with reality, others recognize real damage can be done by these false predictions. When interviewed by Associated Press I was able to say, as others had, "When we engage in this kind of wild speculation, it's irresponsible. It can do damage to naïve believers who can be easily caught up and it runs the risk of causing the church to receive sort of a black eye." (5-18-11).

2) So some, many (!), have predicted our Lord's literal second coming will occur on a specific date only to be sadly disappointed. Others, however, go in a completely different direction by redefining the event and explaining it away all together in order to satisfy a modernist mindset. The liberal pastor and theologian Harry Emerson Fosdick (1878-1969), who for many years carried the liberal theological torch and pastored the influential Riverside Church in New York, said it this way, "Christ is coming! They say it with all their hearts; but they are not thinking of an external arrival on the clouds. They have assimilated as part of the divine revelation the exhilarating insight which these recent generations have given to us, that development is God's way of working out his will...."

And these Christians, when they say Christ is coming, mean that, slowly it may be, but surely, His will and principles will be worked out by God's grace in human life and institutions" ("Shall the Fundamentalists Win?").

3) Neither of these perspectives find one ounce of support in the teachings of Jesus. If either is right then He was wrong and mistaken. However, with the clearest and most confident words you could hope for, our Lord boldly declares "I am coming again" to "gather my elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven" (v. 27). So, "be on guard, keep awake." For you do not know when the time will come" (v. 33).

Transition: As Jesus brings to a close His great eschatological discourse on the Mount of Olives (v. 3), He will reemphasize some of the themes He addressed in verses 1-23, and He will also advance His teachings with words of hope, warning and interesting (even surprising!) theological insight.

I. Jesus will come again to gather His people. 13:24-27

- Jesus utilizes end time eschatological vocabulary and imagery in these verses. That Jerusalem is not mentioned is a death-knell for those who would apply these verses to its destruction in A.D. 70. Note carefully exactly what Jesus says: "in those days." What days? The days "after the tribulation." (v. 24). After those days cosmic, apocalyptic signs will occur: 1) the sun will be darkened (see Rev. 6:12), 2) the moon will not give its light (see Rev. 6:12), 3) and the stars (perhaps meteorites) will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken (see Rev. 6:13-14). Ultimate cosmic upheaval and universal cataclysmic judgment will signal that the end has come. In heaven and on earth the cosmos will be rocked and shaken as God prepares to come in judgment in the person of the Son (cf. Is. 13:9-10; Ezk. 32:7-9, 15; Is. 34:4-5).

- “And then...” (v. 26). What wonderful words of anticipation. “And then they will see.” Who will see? Those on the earth. “They will see the Son of Man,” the great eschatological figure described in Daniel 7:13-14, coming in clouds with great power and glory.” Jesus had previously spoken of his coming in similar words in Mark 8:38. Edward Adams well says, “It is highly likely that Mark would want his readers to understand this reference to the coming of the Son of Man in the light of the previous mention at 8:38. The Old Testament allusions and associations in 13:24-27 fit a picture of the advent of God, with Jesus as the Son of Man in the main role” (“The Coming of the Son of Man,” *Tyndal Bullertin*, 56:1 (2005): 57.
- “And then...” (v. 27). “And then he will send out the angels” who will harvest the work done by suffering saints who have proclaimed the gospel to all the nations” (v. 10). These will be gathered from every corner of the globe as well as the ends of heaven. And what will this look like? Revelation 7:9-10 tells us, “After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”” What an awesome promise that our labor of love for our Lord is not in vain.
- Jesus will come again to gather His people. What a day of celebration that will be. We will have done our work and then He will do His! The kingdom our Lord, the Son of Man, has received from His Father, the Ancient of Days, He will bring to this earth as He begins to make all things new.

Transition: Jesus will come again to gather His people.

II. Jesus will come again and the time is near.

13:28-31

- Jesus moves to amplify what He has just taught by a lesson or illustration from a tree, in this instance a fig tree (v. 28). “Learn its lesson” he says and really, there is nothing complicated, until He gets to the end. Then a theological Pandora’s box is opened! Branches with developing leaves tell us summer is on the way. From this Jesus makes a theological affirmation in v. 29, “so also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates.” The events of chapter 13, especially v. 14-25, tip us off that things, world history, are moving toward a climatic end. These signs warn us “He,” that is Jesus, the Son of Man, is near.” In fact He is “at the very gates”, ready to storm the citadels of sin, Satan, death, hell and the grave. Antichrist (v. 14) with his false prophets (v. 22) are about to meet their doom” (cf. Rev. 19:19-21). Imminency is clearly an essential component of biblical eschatology.
- Then Jesus drops an interpretive bomb on all of us in verse 30, “Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.” The question that is staring us all in the face is who is “this generation?” The answer is not a simple one and how you understand and interpret other parts of Mark 13 will influence how you answer the question. What are the major options:
 - 1) The contemporary generation of Jesus’ day who would see the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.
 - 2) The eschatological generation that will be alive at the end of history who will see all these things because they occur in close proximity to one another.
 - 3) The Jewish people with the word “generation” being understood to mean “race”, a particular race of people.

4) The generation of Jesus' day would see the coming of the Kingdom and unfortunately Jesus was in error and was killed in the process of trying to bring the Kingdom in.

Though dogmatism is unwarranted, I believe the best understanding is #2. "This generation" refers to those who will see all these things occur in rapid fire succession just before Jesus comes again. I believe the future tribulation (v. 24) will be a period of 7 years. There is support for this in Daniel 9:27; Rev. 7:14; 11:3; 12:4, 6; 13:5. If this is true, then the eschatological generation will witness these events in less than a decade.

- The phrase "pass away" is repeated in v. 31 but in a much different context. The temple will pass away. History, as we know it, will come to an end. This present heaven and earth will give way to a new heaven and earth" (see Rev. 21:1). But, God's word, the words of King Jesus, they will never pass away. Nothing is so true, stable, permanent and abiding as is the word of our Lord. Here is a firm foundation upon which we can stand forever. No wonder the prophet Isaiah was inspired to write, "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever" (40:8; cf. 51:6).

III. Jesus will come again but only God knows when.

13:32-37

- If verse 30 is a challenge, verse 32 takes the issue to a whole new level. Jesus is clearly speaking of His coming again (v. 26-27), and of that glorious event He plainly states that "no one knows" when it will happen, "not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." It is that phrase "nor the Son" that troubles us and gives us pause. As orthodox, Bible believing Christians we affirm the full and undiminished deity of God the Son. And as God, He possesses all the attributes of deity including that of omniscience. Yet here He clearly states there is a body of knowledge of which He is, dare I say, ignorant and without knowledge: the day and hour of His own Second Coming. This

statement makes no sense apart from the Incarnation. It, however, makes perfect sense in light of the Incarnation. In taking on a human nature and entering in to the time/space reality, the Son of God did not surrender His deity, but He did lay aside His glory as John 17:5 teaches (cf. also Phil 2:6-11). In laying aside His glory, our Lord for a time relinquished the free exercise of His divine attributes such as the attribute of omniscience. The mystery and beauty of the Incarnation is that the all-knowing Sovereign Son could temporarily lay aside or suspend the free exercise of His “God attributes” so that He might live an authentic human life in submission to His Father and dependence on the Holy Spirit. This also explains why our Lord could be hungry, thirst, grow tired and be killed. Though He knew not the time of His coming then, I strongly suspect that He knows it now as the ascended, exalted and enthroned Lord of all creation! And, here lies another indictment for those caught up in prophetic speculation and date setting. NO ONE KNOWS BUT GOD! He will say this more than once. We really do need to listen.

- We may not know when Jesus will return. However, we do know what we should be doing until He does. Verse 33: “Be on guard, keep awake.” Some text adds a 3rd imperative, “and pray.” The *HCSB* says, “Watch! Be alert!” Why? “For you don’t know when the time will come.” Twice our Lord has affirmed what I like to call “human eschatological agnosticism!” We do not know nor will any of us know when He will come again. He will make this affirmation a third time in v. 35. However, “be on guard, keep awake” (v. 33), “stay awake” (v. 34). Like a man on a journey our Lord has left the house, but only for a while. We, as His servants, have been put in charge with a task: “proclaim the gospel to all nations” (v. 10). We each have our work (v. 34). So be faithful, be ready and “stay awake” (a phrase that ends v. 34 and begins v. 35). Again we

might be tempted to ask “why?” Again, for the third and final time our Lord says, “For you do not know when the master of the house will come” (v. 35).

Stay awake! Stay awake! It could be in the evening.

Stay awake! Stay awake! It could be at midnight.

Stay awake! Stay awake! It could be when the rooster crows.

Stay awake! Stay awake! It could be in the morning.

Bottom-line as verse 36 warns, “He will come suddenly.” His coming is imminent. It could happen at any time including today. You don’t want Him to find you asleep. Not ready. Unprepared. Not doing the work He has given you (v. 34). Oh how tragic it would be for our Lord to return and find His church asleep at the wheel, neglecting her assignment, squandering her resources, deceiving herself into thinking He won’t come today. “Tomorrow, I will get busy serving Him,” only to discover tomorrow is never coming. So for the 3rd time in 5 verses Jesus sounds the warning, a warning He says “to all: stay awake” (v. 37). If He said it once that should be sufficient. That He says it 3 times should really get our attention. “Stay awake” and serve Him today. Tomorrow may never get here!

Conclusion:

- Leila Naylor Morris (1862-1929) wrote more than 1,000 gospel songs. Her eyes began to fail her at the age of 51. To compensate for her loss of sight, her son built her a 28 foot blackboard with oversized staff lines so that she could continue composing songs to the glory of her King.

- One of her songs I began learning as a small boy in my Baptist church in Atlanta, GA. I cannot help wondering if our text was a source of inspiration for Mrs. Morris when she penned the words to the song, “What If It Were Today?”

- 1) Jesus is coming to earth again, what if it were today?
Coming in power and love to reign, what if it were today?
Coming to claim His chosen Bride, all the redeemed and purified,
Over this whole earth scattered wide; what if it were today?
- 2) Satan’s dominion will then be o’er, O that it were today!
Sorrow and sighing shall be no more, O that it were today!
Then shall the dead in Christ arise, caught up to meet Him in the skies,
When shall these glories meet our eyes? What if it were today?
- 3) Faithful and true would He find us here, if He should come today?
Watching in gladness and not in fear, if He should come today?
Signs of His coming multiply; morning light breaks in eastern sky.
Watch, for the time is drawing high; what if it were today?

Refrain) Glory, glory! Joy to my heart ‘twill bring.
Glory, glory! When we shall crown Him King.
Glory, Glory! Haste to prepare the way.
Glory, Glory! Jesus will come some day.

Jesus is coming again! So, “stay awake – for you do not know when the master of the house will come” (v. 35).