

let us be ready. If hardship comes... let us be ready. If Jesus comes... let us be ready. The follower of Jesus is not surprised... they are ready. First, let us be ready in regards to salvation. My friend there is no better day than today to choose to follow Jesus. We all need to know that we have received Jesus as our Lord and Savior and that we have eternal life through Him. Once you have settled that you can face whatever life may bring. We need to be ready. We need to be ready in faithfulness. We need to awake each day to the presence of God. In the place we might never imagine... God is present.

It seems every pro sport has a warning system. In the NFL it is the 2-minute warning. At two minutes there is a time out to say. The game is not over, but it getting close to the end. In baseball there is the more genteel 7th inning stretch. It is another moment that you realize you are way over half way. Not much time is left. In the NBA there is the announcement as the clock hits 1 minute and then over the loudspeaker, even as play continues, you hear ONE MINUTE. Even at a dance the announcement is made... this is the last dance.

The game is not over... it is not too late, but it is getting late. I think that is what Jesus is saying. It is not the end, but it is the beginning of the end, Jesus says. So don't despair, awake to God, be faithful and get ready.



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Wake Up And Get Ready

Mark 13

TRINITY PULPIT

Qur hearts were again broken as the news of the attacks in France began to leak out on Friday afternoon. By the time day broke in Paris there were over 100 dead and nearly another 100 injured. It has become all too obvious that this was another terrorist attack. Not knowing just how many people are involved, what we do know is that there were at least 8 terrorists but maybe more. Again, just like 9-11 it takes only a few who are bent on killing others to bring a nation to unprecedented responses. In many ways, the terrorist again achieved their goal. They killed, they caused fear not only in Paris but also across the world and they made a nation change its very practices. The boarder was shut down in France for the first time since World War II.

This moment in France caused us to notice what we for the most part do not notice and that is terrorism and these types of attacks are an everyday occurrence in other parts of the world. I don't know how you felt on Friday and Saturday as we heard more about the attack on the Paris. I felt angry. I admit that there is an anger that wells up in me when I hear this news. I want revenge. I sense fear. Although, I know that the chances of this happening right here is small, not impossible but small, I still feel a wave of fear. I am heartbroken. I am heartbroken as I see the scenes of innocent people going about life and then nothing but fear. I feel frustration. I am frustrated that our leaders and the leaders of other nations that we have not had a solution to this ongoing issue. I am disheartened with our veterans and families of fallen veterans who have given so much of their lives to fight against the root of such senseless acts and yet they continue.

Jesus says in Mark 13 we must be on guard, be alert, and be prepared for his coming.

We are to wake up and be ready. These are interesting words because they come at the end of what we call the "Olivet discourse." The setting of these words is a conversation between Jesus and his disciples as they make their way out of the city of Jerusalem and look back upon the massive and impressive Temple. We sometimes forget that the disciples for the most part were rural people. Such massive buildings did not surround them as the Temple in Jerusalem. Just like when we might visit one of the great cities of our nation or the world we are overwhelmed by its size.

The disciples say to Jesus with amazement look at these massive stones. Look Jesus at this incredible building. They were amazed. But maybe more amazed at Jesus' next words. Jesus says you see all these great stones not one will be left upon the other, they will all be throw down. Jesus probably could not have said anything that was more surprising. How odd it must have sounded for Jesus to say that this great Temple made of incredible stone and masterwork would turn to rubble. It is really unimaginable that something like this could happen. How could something so sure, so certain, so strong turn to rubble?

The words seem so shocking by Jesus to the disciples that it seems no one says a thing in response. It is not until later in the evening as they are sitting on the Mount of Olives and able to look out at the great city of Jerusalem that Jesus' inner circle comes to Him and asks, "tell us when this is going to happen. What are the signs that this will be fulfilled?" It does not seem that the disciples doubt Jesus' words, but they want to know how and why?

Jesus then goes on a long discourse about what will happen before the Temple is destroyed. There will be false Christ's, nations will war against nations, and there

will be earthquakes and wars and rumors of wars. There will be persecution of the church. Jesus tells them they will be arrested and taken before authorities on account their faith in Jesus. There will be betrayal between brother and brother. Then will come the desolation of the Temple and this will be followed by a great distress. In those days, other false Christs will come but the disciples are not to be afraid.

Then Jesus says, "in the days that follow this distress the sun will be darkened, the moon not give its light, stars will fall from the sky and the heavenly bodies will be shaken. Then the Son of Man will return in His glory and gather His people from the four corners of the earth."

Jesus then gives some information about time. He says to His disciples this generation will not pass away before these things happen.

The discourse concludes by Jesus reminding us that no one knows the hour or day when He will return, so we must be diligent and faithful until He comes again.

This passage presents several challenges to us as we read the words of Jesus. The questions that we must ask are these?

1. Was Jesus predicting the end of world? Is this passage about things that are yet to happen?
2. Was Jesus predicting something the generation of the disciples would experience these events? Was this about something they would pass through?
3. Is this discourse about being faithful in all moments in all of history?

Most scholars agree that the proper reading of Mark 13 is to read it as Jesus speaking about two separate moments in history. The first is the prediction of what would happen to His disciples and to the early church. The description that Jesus gives of the Temple being destroyed occurred in 70 A.D. In fact, the description of the distress described in verses 14-23 is also described in historical documents concerning the siege and destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

Historians tell us of the events of the siege of Jerusalem and destruction of the Temple. The animosity between Roman and Israel grew for years. Caligula even set up a statue for himself in the Holy of Hollies, thus desecrating the temple. Finally, the Jews

revolted against Rome. The result was devastating as Rome put an end to the rebellion. Rome sieged the city and starved them. They sieged them for four years and finally the Roman military bombarded the walls tearing them down leaving them in ruins. The 30,000 marched on Jerusalem and slaughtered and estimated 600,000 residents of Jerusalem. In addition, they destroyed the Temple itself. There are many accounts of a fire that devastated the Temple leaving only a few of its towers in tact. Items were looted as well. There was even great bloodshed inside the Temple. Those who survived were taken into captivity and many sold into slavery.

In this moment of conflict, Israel as a nation ended until the 1940s. The Jewish nation was gone. Their place of worship and center of life gone. Many of them slaughtered. It must have seemed like the sun was darkened and the moon did not shine and stars fell from the sky. Their world was over.

Jesus says this is going to happen and happen it did.

Yet in response to this, He tells them that this is not the end but precedes the true end. The true end would not be Rome's victory. The true end would be the coming of Jesus in all His glory. The coming of Jesus is the promise. When will it come? Jesus says no one knows the day or the hour, but as servants we must be ready and prepared. Jesus says it is like a master going away and leaving his servants in charge with their assigned tasks. They are being busy about their work for they do not know when the master will return. So in all moments they are ready.

Mark 13 is about a word of hope when the world is falling apart and a word of encouragement to be faithful until Jesus returns. Mark 13 guards us from despair when the world is falling apart and keeps us focused in the now when we know heaven is a coming.

First, we shall not despair. Jesus has told His disciples something they could not imagine. How could this incredibly marvelous Temple be destroyed? It was the most massive and indestructible sight they had ever seen, but 40 years later it would be in ruin. They would have never believed it could happen. How many times have we in recent years said we never thought we would see the day? How many times have we simply shaken our head in disbelief and felt a sense of uselessness and despair?

Yet, we shall not despair but have hope. The hope that we have is the same hope that Jesus promises in

Mark 13. Jesus is coming again. That which appears to be the last word is not the last word. That which appears to win does not win. That which appears to be the end is only the necessary process toward the God's resolution.

What are we to do when our world falls apart? What are we to do when our friend's world falls apart? What are we to do when the unthinkable happens? We are not to loose hope or enter into despair.

Every year, thousands of people climb a mountain in the Italian Alps, passing the "stations of the cross" to stand at an outdoor crucifix. One tourist noticed a little trail that led beyond the cross. He fought through the rough thicket and, to his surprise, came upon another shrine, a shrine that symbolized the empty tomb. It was neglected. The brush had grown up around it. Almost everyone had gone as far as the cross, but there they stopped.

WE MUST AWAKE TO OUR WORLD. JESUS SAYS, "BE ALERT OR BE ON GUARD." IT REALLY MEANS TO WAKE UP. TO TAKE NOTICE WHAT IS OCCURRING. WE CANNOT SLEEPWALK THROUGH LIFE.

Far too many have gotten to the cross and have known the despair and the heartbreak. Far too few have moved beyond the cross to the Empty Tomb. We serve a living Savior. It is important to stand together and with even strangers at the place of heartbreak, but we cannot remain there. We serve the God of the cross, but also the empty tomb. We cannot despair.

We must awake to our world. Jesus says, "be alert or be on guard." It really means to wake up. To take notice what is occurring. We cannot sleepwalk through life. Jesus says in the parable, "do not let the master find you sleeping." We cannot sleep walk through life as the church. There is a tendency for us to be distracted by the very things that do not matter. We can sleep walk through the day and even for years. Days turn to years and soon we discover we have been lulled to sleep by life. Jesus is saying wake up and be alert. Take notice in this world. We must be awake to God and awake to others.

In the Old Testament story of Jacob, he comes to a critical point in his life. He is running in fear from his brother Esau after he has tricked his father Isaac for Esau's blessing and birthright. Now he has all he wanted and after receiving it he is now on the run and will spend a lot of his life on the run. He lies down to sleep and has that dream of angels ascending and

descending and when he awakes Jacob makes this great statement.

Surely the Lord was in this place and I knew it not. In a place where he did not expect it, God met him. God meets us in places where we least expect to find God and yet there is God. Jesus instructs us to be on guard, to be alert to wake up and become aware of God's presence in our lives.

Jesus reminds us that we are to be faithful. When times are difficult we are to be faithful. In the parable

Jesus says something interesting. He says that each person is to be about the task they have been assigned. We are to be faithful to do what we can do as we wait the coming and the promise of Christ.

Jesus was guarding His disciples from going to despair when they faced hardship, but He was equally concerned that they would not be faithful because they knew Christ was coming.

Jesus is telling His disciples not to waste their time with conjecture always worrying about His return, instead be faithful in service. Focus on living today. Notice what Jesus says: The owner goes away and gives everyone his or her task and puts on at the door to keep watch. Don't miss this little nuance. Not everyone is watching for the owner. Not everyone is keeping watch, instead there is one who is watching and he can announce the coming. Everyone else is free to do his or her work without worrying if the master comes home at midnight, evening or morning. It does not matter, because the servant is busy being faithful.

Jesus is guarding us from missing the opportunity of being faithful today because we are consumed with his second coming. We don't want to become so heavenly minded that we are no earthly good.

In moments like we are living there are two mistakes we can make. First, we can become so overwhelmed with despair that we forget God is God or we and become so afraid that we isolate ourselves from our world waiting on heaven. We cannot make either. Our world that God loves, that Jesus died for is too important for the church to err in either of these ways. So we do not despair and we remain faithful.

Finally, let us be ready. No matter what might come,