



Christ Reformed Community Church

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“The Olivet Discourse, Part 4” Mark 13:24–37

This morning, take your Bibles again and turn with me, as I said, to Mark chapter 13 if you haven't already, and I want you to stand in honor of the reading of God's Word, Mark chapter 13. We're going to close out our study of the Olivet Discourse, but since we're going to look in some detail at verses 24 through 37, the last part of the Olivet Discourse, I don't want to read the whole chapter in its entirety. So, I want to just pick up in the verses that we will focus in on. Of course, we will review a little bit what we've spoken about before and then dig right in, beginning in verse 24. So, now hear the Word of the Lord, the words of Jesus:

But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. Therefore stay awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning—lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake.

Please be seated. May God add His blessing to His Holy Word, and let's ask Him to add a further blessing to the preaching of His Word.

Father, we read these verses and we understand there is some confusion among the church today as to how we ought to interpret them, and so, Lord, we are very dependent upon Your Holy Spirit. We feel our weakness. We feel our frailty. We feel a sense of confusion, and we need Your Holy Spirit through fresh illumination to open up the Word of God for the people of God. We pray You

would do this for Your glory and for the sake of Your kingdom, we pray and ask all of these things. In the blessed name of Jesus Christ, we ask it. Amen.

As I mentioned, Mark chapter 13 is what we call “The Olivet Discourse.” It’s referred to as a “discourse” because it’s a long section of teaching that Jesus gives to the disciples. We call it “The Olivet Discourse” because Jesus gives it to the twelve apostles on the Mount of Olives, some three hundred feet overseeing Jerusalem, and in particular, overseeing the temple itself. Jesus gives this discourse on Tuesday of the last week of His life on earth. Jesus has answered all sorts of questions in the temple from various religious groups, questions surrounding theology, questions surrounding the secular governing authorities, all sorts of questions in attempt to trap Jesus into saying something that would incriminate Him, that would cause Him to lose credit with His followers. But now the apostles are leaving with Jesus to go to the Mount of Olives, and they ask Jesus some questions about when the coming of the age will be. When will the signs that Jesus speaks about in this passage occur? And what will be the sign of the destruction of the temple which Jesus predicts in these verses? And it’s here that Jesus gives the longest answer to any question that was ever asked of Him that is recorded in the gospel accounts. On Sunday of this week, we saw the triumphal entry of our Lord. He was hailed as King. In Luke’s account, Luke 19:38, the crowd said, *“Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!”* That was on Sunday; He comes into Jerusalem. On Monday, Jesus did something symbolic. He first cursed the fig tree so that it would not bear any fruit, and then He went into the temple, and He cleansed the temple. He chased out the moneychangers. The cursed tree was symbolic because that tree symbolized Israel, an Israel that bore no semblance of true spiritual fruit. And that tree not only symbolized Israel, but the temple symbolized Israel, and after cursing that tree, Jesus walked into the temple. That was the house of Israel, a house full of corruption, a house full of compromise; and Jesus literally chased the moneychangers out of the temple as sort of a condemning, symbolic action of His anger and His fury with the priests of the temple, who were leading Israel in corrupt worship.

I want you, however, to take your Bibles for a moment and turn with me to the book of Revelation, Revelation chapter 11. You think that Mark chapter 13 is controversial, but Revelation as a whole is very perplexing to many interpreters. I believe that much of what takes place in the book of Revelation are events that occurred in the first century. They are not future events, and Revelation 11 is an example of this very thing. Jesus has cleansed the temple, back in Mark chapter 13, the temple which was a picture of true worship. That was its God-intended purpose to be a picture of true worship, to be a picture of protection, to be a picture of fellowship with God, to be a picture of salvation through the sacrifices which were prefigured within its walls. But the temple had become corrupt; it wasn’t a picture of protection but one of vulnerability. It wasn’t a picture of fellowship with God but fellowship with Satan. It wasn’t a picture of salvation but a picture of damnation, God’s cursing of the temple. Well, here in Revelation chapter 11, John describes the temple of the new covenant, verse 1: *“Then I was given a measuring rod like a staff, and I was told, ‘Rise and measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship there, but do not measure the court outside the temple; leave that out, for it is given over to the nations, and they will trample the holy city for forty-two months.’”*

John is describing here what I believe to be the events of AD 70, the same events that Jesus describes in Mark chapter 13. He speaks in verse 2 about the court outside the temple. In the old

covenant scheme of things, this would have been the court of the gentiles, the place that no gentile could go further than. They couldn't get any closer to the shekinah glory of God than the court of gentiles. That was the court, by the way, that Jesus had his exchange with the religious leaders inside of. The language of verse 2, which speaks about leaving out the court outside the temple, the court of the new covenant, that is, which is given over to the nations and trampled, the holy city is, for forty-two months is very similar language to Luke's account of the Olivet Discourse where Luke tells us that, *“They will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive among all nations, and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.”* But here in Revelation chapter 11, John comments on this new covenant temple, and he says, *“When it is built, we need to leave out this outside court.”* He's describing the new covenant temple and who is not allowed within its precincts and who is allowed within its precincts. The phrase there in verse 2 *“leave out,”* that is, the court outside the temple, is the Greek word *ekballō*. It literally means *“to throw out,”* or it literally means—you are more familiar with this term: *“excommunicate.”* There's going to be an excommunication of the entire court of gentiles in the new covenant.

Now, because this is the new covenant temple, the court of the gentiles or the court outside, as John refers to it, is really a reference to unbelieving Jews; that is, those who rejected the Messiah because Jesus is the true temple of the new covenant. So, in other words, John is saying there will no place for outsiders to the new covenant, and who are the outsiders? It's the ones being judged. It's ethnic Jews. In the new covenant, John is saying that ethnic Jews are outside looking in. Just as gentiles were outside looking in in the Old Testament, in the new covenant, Jews will be on the outside looking in, and John even says there's not even going to be a court for those outsiders. None are going to be allowed anywhere near the temple precincts as an act of judgment, and that is true with respect to the new covenant. Paul says this will be true, Romans 11:25, *“Until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.”* But in verse 2 of Revelation 11, *“leave that out,”* *ekballō*, *“excommunicate”* those ethnic Jews, is the same exact language—and this is why I'm bringing it up—it is the same exact word that is used in the gospel accounts to describe what Jesus did when he walked in the temple, and he drove out the moneychangers. He threw them out. *Ekballō*, he *“excommunicated”* those moneychangers, which were symbolic of religious Israel.

Not only that, but in Revelation 11, it says, *“Do not measure the court outside the temple.”* There's no need for an outside court. Outsiders won't be allowed in the new covenant. *“Leave that out, for it is given over to the nations, and they will trample the holy city for forty-two months.”* Forty-two months is roughly three and a half years, and there is a literal and a figurative fulfillment of this. Eighty-four months would be seven years, and seven in the Bible is the number of completion. So, what is half of seven? Half of seven is a broken seven. It's three and a half, and in the Bible, particularly in the prophet Daniel, three and a half years, a broken seven is symbolic of sadness, devastation, death, brokenness, heartache, and defeat. And that is exactly what happened in AD 70 with the Jewish nation; utter and total heartache, devastation, defeat, and death at the hands of the Romans by God, who was excommunicating ethnic Jews from the new covenant temple because they had killed the Messiah. They had rejected Him. And at the end of the destruction and death, God's kingdom, the new covenant, God's true Israel was established. It is interesting that for three and a half years, the Romans laid siege to Jerusalem, forty-two months; so that what John speaks about in Revelation 11 had a literal fulfillment in AD 70, and figuratively, it symbolized

the end of the Jewish nation. It’s important to keep that in mind as we now turn back to Mark chapter 13.

In our discussion of the Olivet Discourse, we have really tried to make this as simple as we possibly can. Jesus is making one point, and the point is that God’s judgment on Israel is coming. The old covenant, therefore, is coming to an end. It will be the end of an epoch, the end of an era, and the beginning of a new period of time, a new covenant in which Jesus Christ, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, upon His ascension will rule and reign over one kingdom, the kingdom of His people, the new covenant made up of believers in Jesus Christ, both Jews and gentiles, people from every stripe, every tribe, every nation, every country. That is His point. This is the end of the temple, which means it’s the end of the covenant, which means it’s the end of ethnic Israel. That’s His one point, and He makes seven sweeping statements to support that one point. First of all, He makes a supernatural prediction in verse 1 and 2. We looked at this. The apostles are looking at the complex of the temple, and they’re mesmerized by the great buildings and the stones that are there, one of the wonders of the ancient world, and Jesus says, “Yes, it’s nice and it’s beautiful, and it is wonderful, but it’s going to be destroyed.” Well, this sends the disciples in a tizzy. How in the world can God allow this temple to be destroyed? Jesus supernaturally predicts its utter and total devastation, and that led, number two, to the fearful anticipation, verses 3 through 5, where the disciples say, for example in verse 4, *“Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of these things?”* Jesus says in verse 5, *“See that no one leads you astray.”* Jesus says, “The things that I’m going to tell you are things that people will twist and pervert and confuse you about. You need to listen to My word on the subject.”

And that led us, number three, to the critical explanation in verses 6 through 8 where Jesus says, *“You will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed. The end is not yet. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.”* There will be natural phenomena, which are really supernatural because God sends them—earthquakes and famines—and Jesus says, *“These are but the beginning of the birth pains.”* There is a labor that is taking place because there is the birth of a new covenant. There is the end of one covenant, and all of these signs, the destruction on Israel by the hands of the Romans are signs by God to the apostles that God is beginning a new covenant. A critical explanation, which led, number four, to the inevitable persecution in verses 9 through 13 that ensued in which they’re brought before councils. They’re *“beaten in synagogues.”* They *“stand before governors and kings,”* and that’s exactly what happened in the first century with the apostles. They were martyrs for the sake of Christ, and the gospel was proclaimed as verse 10 says, *“to all nations.”* All the nations of the known world that made up the Roman empire heard the gospel. They were brought by trial and delivered over, verse 11; and not only that, they were delivered over by family members. Brother delivered brother, *“the father his child,”* children rose against their parents.” And, of course, you see that theme throughout the first century church. You even see a believing wife married to an unbelieving husband. The apostle Peter addresses that issue. There’s going to be all sorts of inevitable persecution for the apostles that Jesus predicts just prior to AD 70 and the destruction of the temple.

And that led us, number five, to the pivotal preparation, verses 14 through 23. We saw this last week, the famous abomination of desolation mentioned in verse 14, which we noted was the Roman armies with their standards and their flags marching into Jerusalem with the symbolism of pagan deities, burning incense in the name of Caesar right at the altar that God had prescribed for

the nation of Israel. This was an abomination and it led to a desolation, a destruction of the temple. God was mocking Israel by allowing these pagan Roman military men to burn incense in Caesar’s name as if to say, “If you’re not going to treat this temple the way you should treat it, I’m going to allow anyone to come in and absolutely destroy it because you have rejected the Messiah.” And we noted that last week. So, there are these seven points Jesus is making, His larger point being this is the end of the old covenant, the end of one era, the beginning of a new covenant and a new era. The supernatural prediction, the fearful anticipation, the critical explanation, the inevitable persecution, the pivotal preparation, leads us now, sixth to what we want to call the actual interpretation, verses 24 through 31, or you could call this the natural interpretation. We’ve been trying to get to this from the beginning. Verse 24: *“But in those days, after that tribulation...”* What sort of tribulation? The one described against Israel:

The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

We’ll stop right there for just a moment because those verses, verses 24 through 27, at first glance appear that Jesus is speaking about something different. In fact, many interpreters will say that Jesus is shifting now to speak about His second coming just prior to the consummation, and that the tribulation that He’s been speaking about really was something that’s going to take place in the future as well, a so-called seven-year tribulation from which the church will be raptured out of, and then Jesus will return a second time to establish a literal one thousand year reign upon earth. But as we’ve studied this passage, to see that would be quite unnatural, given all that we’ve seen regarding the events that match events that occurred in AD 70, that match things that Jesus says are going to happen, this great tribulation of the Jews when the Romans laid siege to Jerusalem, and yet many still maintain that verses 24 through 27 talk about the second coming of Christ. In fact, if I were to quote those verses to you, if I wasn’t preaching in Mark, and I were to quote those verses to you and poll you, most of you would say those verses are about the second coming of Christ, and yet to believe that would be quite unnatural. But you see the problem is that admittedly, the language that is used here in these verses does sound very similar to language in the New Testament that does speak about the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. You remember Paul said, *“For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise.”* And he says, *“Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.”* And people say, “See, Mark 13 is describing that event, the Lord descending from heaven,” because it speaks about the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.

However, remember two very important key principles in interpreting the Bible that we’ve gone over time and time again. Number one is context. What does verse 30 say? Skip down to it. *“Truly, I say to you, this generation will,”* what? *“not pass away until all these things take place,”* the generation of the apostles. Jesus can’t be speaking about some future second coming. Secondly, Scripture helps interpret Scripture. In other words, Scripture is its own best commentary on Scripture. So, you say, “Where else might we find similar language to what we read in these verses?” For example, notice your Bibles, verse 24: *“But in those days, after that tribulation, the*

sun” is darkened, the moon doesn’t give its light, and the stars begin falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. Where do we find language like that? Well, turn with me to Isaiah chapter 13. I read this entire chapter to you for our Old Testament reading, but in this I want to highlight the verses that use almost identical language to describe another event occurring in Isaiah’s day. The end of verse 4 says, *“The LORD of hosts is mustering a host for battle.”* And verse 6 says:

*Wail, for the day of the Lord is near;
as destruction from the Almighty [from God] it will come!
Therefore all hands will be feeble,
and every human heart will melt.
They will be dismayed:
pangs and agony will seize them;
they will be in anguish like a woman in labor.*

What does Jesus speak about in Mark 13? Child pains, labor pains, very similar language. It’s almost as if Jesus knows the Old Testament. It’s almost as if Jesus is playing the role of an Old Testament prophet in Mark 13, and then verse 9: *“The day of the Lord comes.”* It’s *“cruel.”* It comes *“with wrath and fierce anger to make the land a desolation.”* Jesus spoke about the abomination of desolation *“to destroy its sinners.”* Now, here it is, verse 10:

*For the stars of the heavens and their constellations
will not give their light;
the sun will be dark at its rising,
and the moon will not shed its light.
I will punish the world for its...iniquity;
I will put an end to the pomp of the arrogant.*

This is the day of the Lord Isaiah speaks about, and in Isaiah 13 that we just read and in Mark 13, it sounds like the creation itself is collapsing. It speaks about the sun no longer giving light, but is darkened, and the moon fails to give its light, and the stars are falling from the heavens. I mean, it’s almost like someone walking into your house, shaking your Christians tree, the star on top falling down, and all the ornaments crashing in tiny little pieces. That is the imagery that Jesus uses to follow the imagery that Isaiah uses. Now what is this? Well, this is an example of apocalyptic, dramatic, poetic, hyperbolic, exaggerated language, figurative language to describe the warning of God’s coming judgment, and in Isaiah 13, Isaiah the prophet is not referring to the end of human history when he refers to the stars falling. He’s referring to the end of an era, the end of the Babylonians. And in Mark 13, Jesus isn’t referring to the end of human history. He’s just borrowing the language of Isaiah, something all Old Testament prophets did, and there is actually a neat and clear correspondence because Isaiah 13:1 speaks about the oracle concerning Babylon. You see, Isaiah is predicting that Old Testament Babylon is the object of God’s judgment, and in verse 17, Isaiah mentions the Medes as being the instrument of God’s judgment against the Babylonians.

Isaiah is not saying this is the end of the world. Isaiah is not saying that the world is literally falling apart, as if the very cosmos itself comes to a cataclysmic demise. Rather, Isaiah is saying it will

feel like the end of the world for the Babylonians. Indeed, it will be the end of their world because God’s going to rock their world in judgment. Their world will come to an end because their existence is going to come to an end. The whole Babylonian empire is going to be crushed. So the prophecy of Isaiah refers to the overthrow of Babylon as a result of the Medes invading them. Isaiah is saying that the God of the universe is acting by His providential superintendence to metaphorically darken the light of heaven on this mighty nation, so its very stars fall. And when we go back to Mark 13, Jesus is using the same sort of language to describe the Romans overthrowing the Jewish nation in AD 70. Jesus is saying that God’s judgment is coming by the Romans, and the stars of Israel are going to fall. The sun will no longer shine on Israel. The moon will no longer give its light. As a matter of fact, the heavenly lights in the Bible represent nations, kingdoms, and empires. The language of astronomical phenomenon symbolized the fall of political powers. Stars were extinguished because Babylon worshiped the stars. Or when Egypt was judged, the sun was darkened because Egypt worshiped the moon. The symbolism of universal collapse of the sun and the moon and the stars refers to the powerful fall of nations and empires when the King, that is the sun, S-U-N, the sun of righteousness replaces all nations, including Israel. He establishes His kingdom, and when does He do that? He marks it in human history in AD 70 with the destruction of the Jewish nation. Interestingly, during the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, there were some reports of astronomical phenomena, including a comet that eyewitnesses saw streaming across the sky. Josephus, the Jewish historian, reports it this way. He says:

A few days after that feast, later on the one and twentieth day of the month Artemisias, a certain prodigious and incredible phenomenon appeared: I suppose the account of it would seem to be a fable, were it not related by those that saw it, and were not the events that followed it of so considerable a nature as to deserve such signals; for, before sun-setting, chariots and troops of soldiers in their armor were seen running about among the clouds, and surrounding of cities. Moreover [Josephus says], at that feast which we call Pentecost, as the priests were going by night into the inner [court of the temple,] as their custom was, to perform their sacred ministrations, they said that, in the first place, they felt a quaking, and heard a great noise, and after that they heard a sound as of a great multitude, saying, “Let us remove hence.”

In other words, Josephus says that several people claimed to see chariots and armored soldiers moving around in the clouds. Now, I don’t know if this actually took place or not; I wasn’t there, but this sounds very similar to an event that occurred in the life of Elisha the prophet. You remember when the king of Assyria sent an army to capture Elisha the prophet, and the prophet’s servant is wringing his hands. He is panicking, and Elisha trusts in the Lord, and he prays for the servant, and he says, “O God, please open the eyes of my servant,” and God answered that prayer. His servant’s eyes were opened, and what did he see? He saw the mountain full of horses and chariots of fire surrounding Elisha. That leads R. C. Sproul to say in his commentary and I quote:

It is possible that some of the people in Jerusalem in AD 70 were given a similar vision, a vision of the armies of the Lord come not to protect God’s prophet, not to protect God’s people, not to protect God’s priests but to carry out His judgment upon them.

Now, I honestly don’t know what to make of these sights people claimed to see and sounds they claimed to have heard in AD 70, but either way this is Old Testament figurative, hyperbolic, dramatic, poetic language that Jesus is copying from the Old Testament when He speaks about a tribulation where the sun is darkened, verse 24, the moon not giving its light, verse 25, the stars falling from heaven and the powers in the heavens shaken, the powers in the heavens, the stars of

Babylon and Egypt. The stars of Israel would fall. And then we read in verse 26, *“And then they will see [Jesus says] the Son of Man coming in clouds”*—there’s the language of clouds again—*“with great power and glory.”* Again, is this a reference to the second coming of Christ at the end of the world? That’s what a lot of people want you to believe. If it’s not, which I have maintained indeed it is not, then in what way did Jesus come in clouds with great power and glory in AD 70? Well, notice Jesus refers to Himself as the Son of Man: *“Then they will see the Son of Man coming.”* Where does this language of Son of Man come from? Well, you’re familiar with it. We’ve gone to Daniel chapter 7 many times where Daniel says:

I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

But there was one kingdom that was destroyed in AD 70, and that was the kingdom of Israel, and it’s because the Son of Man was coming to establish His everlasting kingdom, the Son of Man. Remember verse 30: *“Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.”* So, verse 26, when it says, *“They will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory,”* this is not a reference to the second return of Christ. This is a reference to the Son of Man who is pictured in the clouds. In fact, in Matthew’s account of the Olivet Discourse, Matthew 24:30, it refers to the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. The sign of the Son of Man in heaven. Think about this. The sign of the Son of Man in heaven points to the reality that Jesus is at the right hand of God. This is not His literal coming to the ground in His body. This is a sign that He’s enthroned in heaven. Matthew 24:30, *“the sign of the Son of Man [in heaven.]”* That’s what they saw. They did not see the Lord descending from heaven to the ground, 1 Thessalonians 4. That refers to His second coming, but what Jesus refers to here is the Son of Man in heaven. So, the signs of this judgment are signs pointing to our Lord’s enthronement, pointing to our Lord’s exaltation, pointing to the reality that the powerful King of all kings is establishing the last kingdom that will exist and that will matter, and He is unleashing His judgment to prove that, so that the smoke rising from the ashes of the temple’s destruction was a sign to the Jews that the Son of Man is no longer dead. He is in heaven. He is at God’s throne, sovereignly moving against them in just judgment.

Remember, AD 70 happens after the resurrection. It happens after the ascension, and all the Jews continued in their rebellion, and all the Jews offered all these sacrifices. The corruption continued, and God came in AD 70, the Son of Man in the clouds with great power and glory, and He said, *“I want you to understand. You may have killed me, but I am alive.”* And what is the proof of that? *“I am judging you. I am destroying the temple.”* And Jesus even said this was going to happen. You remember His words to Caiaphas, the high priest? *“But I tell you, from now on,”* Jesus says, *“you will see the Son of Man...coming on the clouds of heaven, seated at the right hand of God.”* That is what Jesus is referring to here, verse 26: *“The Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.”* This is a sign, the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, that the Son of Man is present among them *“in clouds with great power and glory,”* bolstered by the fact of what Jesus says in verse 27.

Notice your Bibles: *“And then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.”* Again, some say this is a reference to a secret rapture of saints, supernatural angels that go and whisk away saints at the end of time before the so-called seven-year tribulation. But we’ve already established Jesus is talking about events that occurred in the first century, events that He uses Old Testament language to describe. He’s not speaking literally in the sense that stars are going to fall. This is not a cataclysmic demise; this is the end of the world of Israel. It’s the end of the world of the old covenant, and in fact, in verse 27 when it says, *“he will send out the angels,”* it’s the Greek word *angelos*. It literally means “messenger,” and oftentimes in the Bible this word *angel* refers to human messengers. Think of Revelation 2 and 3, John’s message by Jesus to the churches. They all have an angel. They all have a messenger. That’s the pastor of the church. That’s the preacher of the church. And in Mark 1:2, John the Baptist is called God’s messenger, the messenger of God’s covenant, copying from Malachi 3:1.

So, verse 27, *“And then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven,”* well, this is a reference to the worldwide proclamation of the gospel by His messengers, by His preachers, by His prophets following the destruction of the temple. It is very interesting to me that when Paul writes to churches in the first century, for example, he writes to the church at Rome, citizens of Rome who were Christians in the AD 50s. And as early as the AD 50s, prior to AD 70 and the destruction of the temple, Paul says stuff like this. He says, *“First I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you because your faith is proclaimed in all the world. In all the world.”* Verse 27 says that God’s going to send His angels, His messengers, to *“gather the elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven,”* that is, His elect from the world. And Paul writes to the Romans, and he says, “Look, the gospel has already gone out into the world.” He says it at the end—you’re more familiar with this:

Now to him who is able to strengthen you,” the end of Romans, *“according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith.*

What was the command of the eternal God? It was the Great Commission: “Go into all the world and preach the gospel, disciple the nations, baptize them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” So, from Paul’s perspective, writing in the latter part of AD 50s, before AD 70 and the destruction of the temple, from Paul’s perspective, he was one of those messengers that God had sent, one of His ambassadors, one of His preachers through whom God would gather, as verse 27 says, *“the elect...from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.”* In fact, one commentator says of verse 27:

Here Jesus is speaking of sending forth His messengers to trumpet the gospel of salvation. The collapse of the old covenant economy and the destruction of the temple is the sign that the gospel of God’s saving grace is spreading to all the world. The messengers are overflowing the boundaries of Old Testament Israel. God is finished with sacrifices. God is finished with human priests. He will no longer confine His grace to a single nation. The gospel will go to all the nations.

And that, my friends, reveals a new covenant, a new era. The ending of one era, the beginning of another because even in places like Psalm 147, the psalmist says that God *“declares his word to*

Jacob,” God declares *“his statutes”* to Jacob, *“his...rules to Israel. He has not dealt thus with any other nation.”* They don’t know Him. Or Amos 3:2: *“You only have I known of all the families of the earth,”* God says to Israel, to the people of Abraham. He had specifically revealed Himself to Israel. He had specifically chosen that nation in the old covenant, but here in verse 27, Jesus predicts that the elect are going to be gathered from the furthest part of the earth to the farthest part of heaven. You know what that means? It means in all directions. To copy the language of Deuteronomy 4:32: *“from one end of heaven to the other,”* that these elect from the nations are gathered into a new body called the church of the Lord Jesus Christ of the new covenant.

That is why Peter can refer to the church as *“a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”* He is the sun, S-U-N of righteousness, and He is establishing His new kingdom with the destruction of Israel, the establishment of the new covenant, the gathering of all these elect in, so that we read in the book of Hebrews, Hebrews 8: *“In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.”* This is the testimony of Scripture, that the great tribulation of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple ended the old covenant and established the new covenant.

You say, “Well, pastor, is there a great tribulation?” Yes, there’s a great tribulation. Jesus says there is, but it’s not at the end of world history. It’s at the end of the world of the old covenant. The tribulation is not at the end of Christian history; it’s the beginning of Christian history in the first century. All of the signs and the things that occur with the destruction of the temple marks this period of great tribulation. In fact, Matthew’s account of the Olivet Discourse refers to it as the great tribulation. That’s where that very language comes from. As a matter of fact, turn back with me to Matthew chapter 24 just for a moment. I alluded to this verse previously, but as Jesus was on the Mount of Olives with the disciples, Mark abbreviates the question that they ask him, but Matthew really amplifies there was more to their question. Matthew 24:3: *“As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, ‘Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming?’”* Now, watch this and underline it in your Bibles. *“What will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?”* The end of the age? Is that referring to the end of the world, or is that referring to the end of the Old Testament, the end of the old covenant, the end of Israel as God’s special people and the beginning of a new age, the age of the gentiles? Well, I believe it’s not talking about the end of the world, but the end of an age or the end of an epoch.

Listen to these words from Luke’s account of the Olivet Discourse. He says, *“The Jews “will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive among all nations, and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. Times of the Gentiles.”* You realize we’re living in the times of the gentiles. Look at the church today. It’s largely gentile, believing gentiles, but that wasn’t true in the Old Testament. Those were the times of the Jews. Paul specifically refers to the fullness of the gentiles coming into the kingdom of God before the final consummation, Romans 11:25. And Paul speaks about the ends of the ages coming upon the Jews in 1 Corinthians 10:11. So, these are first-century events being fulfilled. The great tribulation occurred in AD 70.

Now, the certainty of this is seen in the verses that I keep repeating to you throughout this series, and finally we get to them. Notice verses 30 and 31: *“Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.”* These are things that are taking place in the lives of the apostles. *Tauta pánta*, “all these things,” a natural, plain reading of Mark 13. All these things—you don’t have to have Greek to know this—literally means “all these things.” Everything Jesus has said. When does He say it? He says it in the early AD 30s. When is the destruction of the temple? AD 70, a generation, about forty years. You see, Jesus’ predictive math is not just approximate; it’s precise. *“This generation will not pass away until all these things take place.”* Verse 31: *“Heaven and earth will pass away,”* Jesus says, *“but my words will not pass away.”* The passing away of heaven and earth does not mean the total annihilation of heaven and earth, but its glorious renewal. Remember Paul said in 1 Corinthians 7:31, *“The present form of this world is passing away.”* Paul said in Romans 8:22, *“For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.”* Jesus even speaks about the pains of childbirth at the beginning of the new covenant because this is the restoration. As far as the curse is found, the whole world is being renewed and renovated.

So, Jesus says, *“Heaven and earth will pass away,”* There’s going to be a refurbished and renewed heaven and earth, but notice He says in verse 31, *“But my words will not pass away.”* By comparing it to the old covenant world of heaven and earth being renewed into a newer, more glorious one because of the redemptive powerful work of the gospel, Jesus says, *“My words will not pass away.”* What Jesus says will come to pass, and it did come to pass in AD 70. His words will not pass away. That is to say—let me put it to you in a simpler way—His words should not try to be improved upon. His words should not be stretched far into the future of what He says in Mark 13. His words should not be twisted to mean anything other than a plain, natural reading of the text. *Tauta pánta*, all these things, this generation. Jesus isn’t predicting anything that will occur in your future. They’re things that occurred in the apostles’ future, but our past, and Jesus says, *“This generation will not pass away until all these things take place.”* You could bank on it. Heaven and earth may pass away. It may be renewed. *“But my words will not pass away.”* God’s words are more settled than the mountains that don’t move. God’s word is more settled than the sea that has never dried up, and although those sturdy things that are normal to this cosmos and this world that seem to be unalterable unless God puts His hand upon it, Jesus says, *“My word will never pass away. The world you live in is going to change, but my word will never change.”* So, we take His words at face value. The world as we know it in its present form, because of the effects of sin, is not as settled as the word of Jesus, and He says all these things took place in the generation of the apostles.

Now, I want you to go back to verse 28 because we skipped over it on purpose. Jesus says, *“From the fig tree learn its lesson.”* Now, that’s interesting language, isn’t it? Jesus had cursed a fig tree earlier, in fact, just the day before. We mentioned that. He had cursed it. If you turn with me just for a moment to Luke chapter 21, which is Luke’s version of the Olivet Discourse, he speaks about this fig tree. Verse 29: *“And he told them a parable: ‘Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. As soon as they come out in leaf, you see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near.’”* You know that the kingdom of God is near? Fig trees and really all trees represent to us a change of seasons, right? When you see the leaves and then you see the fruit, it’s a change of seasons. Jesus is saying, *“There’s going to be a shift regarding the nature of My kingdom,”* and He’s using a tree

to illustrate that. Verse 28: *“From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things,”* verse 29 *“taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates.”* Or to borrow Luke’s language, *“You know that the kingdom of God is near.”*

Trees make up an important part of God’s creation. From the very beginning of time, going all the way back to the book of Genesis, it says that God created trees as emblems of His glory. *“And out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food.”* And then *“The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.”* Those were sort of the centerpieces of God’s garden. But God’s world that He created for Adam and Eve was fit with trees. When the fall occurred, thorns and thistles came in, and that led to God choosing Israel as His people, and what does He describe Israel as in the Old Testament? Well, He describes it as a tree. Let me give you an example. The prophet Ezekiel says, *“On the mountain height of Israel will I plant [my people], that it may bear branches and produce fruit and become a noble cedar.”* So, the image of a cedar tree marked Israel in the Old Testament. *“And under it will dwell every kind of bird; in the shade of its branches birds of every sort will nest.”* In other words, the cedar tree represented Israel, and in fact, the temple on Mount Moriah was made of what? Cedarwood, 1 Kings chapter 6. The birds represent the nations in the court of gentiles who nestled themselves in its shade, the shade of the porticos, but what did we read earlier in Mark? If you go back with me to Mark chapter 4—and I know we’re bouncing around a little bit, but it’s important for you to see this. Jesus gave another parable in verse 30:

And he said, “With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth, yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.”

You say, “Jesus was a good storyteller.” Yeah, He was, but He also had a good source, and that source was the Old Testament. Jesus is borrowing language from Ezekiel 17. I just read it to you. And so, with any such parables, He spoke a word to them so they were able to hear it. Jesus speaks, not here about a cedar, but He shifts the imagery to that which comes from a mustard seed, which becomes larger than all the garden plants, but like the cedar, it puts out its large branches so the birds of the air can nest in its shade. What is Jesus doing in Mark 4? What is Jesus doing in Mark 13? He’s talking about trees, fig trees. Luke says, all trees, Jesus says. They’re all symbolic of the kingdom that is drawing near, indicating a shift from the cedar tree of Israel in the Old Testament, as the ethnic people of God, now to this new covenant tree the Son of David is planting, the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords. David’s kingdom, the Davidic kingdom, marked by cedarwood would be replaced by a tree that comes from a mustard seed, the smallest of all seeds which—listen to this—have no Old Testament associations. None. Jesus is speaking about something new here. One theologian puts it this way:

In the new covenant, we have a shift. Jesus repeated the parable of the cedar tree from Ezekiel 17, but transformed it to the mustard, a tree without any Old Testament associations. This must have offended His first audience, for they would have taken it as a deliberate assault on their hopes for a revived Davidic monarchy, but Jesus was announcing that His kingdom would be of a different sort, as different as the humble mustard from the mighty cedar is, the mustard and olive trees seemed to be preeminently associated with the new covenant.

What did Jesus do? He cursed that fig tree because it symbolized the kingdom. And what do we read earlier in Mark 13? That kingdom would be against kingdom. Remember, Jesus predicted that? You want to know what kingdoms He’s talking about? The kingdom of Jesus Christ would go to battle with the kingdom of the Davidic monarchy of Israel in the destruction of the temple. That’s what verse 8 means. *“For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.”* There’s a holy nation coming, the true people of God, the new covenant Israel. This is going to be a clash of one kingdom against the next. Let’s see who wins. The Son of Man is coming in the clouds with great power and glory. He’s been resurrected. He’s ascended to the right hand of God. He now has the authority through the world-changing resurrection and ascension to unleash His judgment on ethnic Israel and to establish His new kingdom with a new tree that Paul picks up on regarding that imagery. The olive tree, right? In Romans chapter 11, described as a tree where wild olive branches are grafted in. All of this imagery revealing that Jesus is speaking about the shift to a different covenant, a different covenant.

Heaven and earth may pass away, Jesus says, but His words will not pass away. This will happen. So, that in verses 24 really through verse 31, the most natural way to interpret it gives to us and yields to us the actual interpretation of the entire Olivet Discourse. Jesus is predicting the destruction of Israel with the destruction of the temple, which symbolizes corrupt Israel as an event that will occur in the lifetime of the disciples, a great tribulation that occurs in our past and in the apostles’ future. Without understanding verses 24 through 31, you can’t understand any of what Jesus is saying, and that now takes us to the final point which we will go over quickly because we understand what Jesus is saying now. First, we’ve seen the supernatural prediction; second, the fearful anticipation; third, the critical explanation; fourth, the inevitable persecution; fifth, the pivotal preparation; sixth, the actual or natural interpretation; number seven, the practical illustration. Notice with me in verse 32:

But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. Therefore stay awake [Jesus says]—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning—lest he come suddenly and find you asleep.

Jesus gives this practical illustration, again, not for us, but for the apostles who needed to stay awake. He’s been giving them the signs, marking the events of the destruction of the temple in AD 70, and now the Lord is clear. Before giving this illustration that these signs, He didn’t know exactly when they were going to occur. Isn’t that amazing to think about? Our Lord when He walked this earth did not know the exact date. In fact, He says that, right? He says, *“No one knows, concerning that day or that hour, not even the angels in heaven nor the Son, but only the Father.”* During His incarnation, He purposely placed upon Himself limitations, and one of those limitations apparently was that concerning the particular day and hour; that is, the date of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. He didn’t know. The Father kept that to Himself during Jesus’ incarnation. You say, “Well, how then did He predict it?” Well, Jesus knew the Old Testament Scriptures. Jesus was also aware of the Father’s plan before the foundation of the world, together with the Holy Spirit, and furthermore, He knew that a major shift was going to take place. When they put Him to death, He knew He was going to raise from the dead. He was going to ascend to

the right hand of God which would mean He would have sovereign power to execute judgment upon Israel, and Jesus was a reader of theology. Jesus was a reader of His times, and Jesus understood that there was this political tension going on between the Jewish Zealots and the Romans, and so Jesus was able to project pretty closely, almost precisely, the time period in which it would occur—before this generation passes away. But He didn’t know the exact date during His earthly life.

Now, when He ascended, He obviously did, right? He’s the one that unleashed the judgment. He was the one, as verse 29 says, who was *“near, at the very gates.”* The Son of Man was at the very gates of Jerusalem, symbolized in the Roman army. He came on clouds with great power and glory. He returned, figuratively to judge Israel. And having already told the apostles their duty, verse 10, to proclaim the gospel in all the nations, which is later reaffirmed in the Great Commission, Matthew 28, *“Go into all the world and preach the gospel,”* He now gives this practical illustration for the early church not to fall asleep because these events are going to soon take place in the generation of the apostles. So notice verse 33. Jesus says, *“Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come.”* Here’s the illustration: *“It is like a man going on a journey.”* What is that a reference to? Well, that represents Christ. He went on a journey, didn’t He? He went to the cross, and He went from the cross to the grave, and He went from the grave to the skies. Jesus was *“a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his own work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake.”* The servants are the apostles. He has commanded them, *“You’re going to receive persecution,”* verse 9. Verse 10: *“The gospel must first be proclaimed.”* *“You have a duty. Proclaim the gospel,”* and make sure, verse 35, *“Therefore [that you] stay awake.”* Why? Because, verse 35, *“For you do not know when the master of the house [that is, Jesus] will come.”* *“You don’t know when this devastation on Jerusalem and the temple is going to come.”*

Remember, the early church met in Jerusalem. It’s where the church was, and all these signs were given to them to remind them that they were to flee to the mountains of Judea. They were to leave Jerusalem because of its destruction. So, Jesus is telling the disciples, *“You’re the servants I’m putting in charge, and you are to warn the early church.”* Notice verse 37: *“And what I say to you,”* What does Jesus say? *“I say to all: Stay awake.”* In other words, *“Take this message I’m giving you about this coming destruction and give it to the early church so they can escape Jerusalem.”* And they did; the apostles were faithful. The early church escaped judgment. It was only unbelieving Jews that were in Jerusalem when the Romans laid siege. It was only unbelieving Jews that were in the temple when it was devastated. So, Jesus gives this practical illustration to tie it all together to repeat what he said in verse 23: *“Be on guard.”* *“Be awake. Stay alert,”* for the apostles to heed.

Now, as I said, these verses, really all of Mark 13, are not a reference to the second coming of Christ. This is not a reference to Jesus’ second coming to judge the world. Jesus is coming to judge the world, 1 Thessalonians 4. He will descend from heaven. He will come, and He will judge the world. That’s not happened yet. These verses don’t speak about that. It’s not Jesus coming to judge the world; it’s His coming to judge the end of the world of old covenant Israel, the people of God in the Old Testament, so that God’s true kingdom could blossom, so that the birds of the nations could find shade in its branches, so the people from every tribe and tongue and country could come to a saving knowledge of Christ as the church faithfully proclaims the gospel.

Beloved, we are in the kingdom of Christ. He has established His kingdom, and there's a sense in which we need to stay awake. We need to stay awake to the big perspective of what God is doing in the world throughout history. We should not get hot and bothered over things that occur in the political climate, things of which we have no control of, but Jesus has full control of. Do you really think an honest reading of the Old Testament will lead you to the conclusion that we are living in the worst times that people have ever lived in? You drove in an airconditioned car to sit in an airconditioned church, with nobody preventing you from doing it. You have all the modern conveniences of what God's sovereign providence has afforded to you, and you live on this side of the cross where Jesus is ruling and reigning, where He has confirmed the fact that He's established His new covenant people by judging ethnic Israel. We don't live in the worst of times. History ebbs and flows. God is in control of the political elections. He's in control of the corruption, and if there's not corruption, America's getting what we deserve anyway. We're the ones that have elected immoral pagans, and that is a sign of God's judgment upon us, but God could lift that judgment if He chooses to. We need to stay awake. We are part of the kingdom of Christ. Nothing can separate us from the love of God.

Secondly, we need to stay active in kingdom advancement. We need to stay awake to the big perspective, but also, we need to stay active. We shouldn't grow apathetic. We shouldn't try to escape from this world. We shouldn't have this sort of gnostic, dualistic approach to the body and material things. We are to enjoy all of God's creation, and we are to use all of God's creation, including the modern conveniences of technology to proclaim the gospel because we know that Jesus has given us that commission, and He has promised that from the four winds, from one side of heaven to the other side of the earth, God will gather in His elect people. And Jesus is not going to return until all His elect are gathered in, so we need to invest in kingdom work, the proclamation of the gospel. We need to invest generationally in our children, in the next generation of this church, to ensure that this church is here the next generation and the next generation and the next generation. We aren't to just live for this time. We aren't to be selfish and just live for ourselves because we've been deceived into thinking some rapture that the Bible doesn't mention is going to happen before some great literal tribulation is going to occur that the Bible doesn't speak about. We're in the kingdom of Christ. He is ruling and reigning, and He is going to return again bodily to judge the world, but there's a lot of things that need to occur in the world before He returns. The gospelization of the nations, the evangelization of the world. We need to stay awake. We need to stay active.

Third and finally, we need to stay attuned to Jesus' words about the end times. If you are confused, join the club. The study of eschatology is confusing. It is my job as your pastor to make it as simple as I can and as clear as I can, but the fact of the matter is this; these are difficult things that we're talking about, and there are good people on both sides that interpret things a little bit different and nuance things a little bit different. But here is a simple point of application: stay attune to what Jesus says about the last things because if you take a plain, natural reading of Mark chapter 13, the next time you study the book of Revelation, things are going to be opened up to you in a way they've never been opened up to you before. And you're not going to leave worship wringing your hands, wonder what's going to happen in the world. You're going to say, "I already know what's happening in the world. Jesus is ruling and reigning, He is just. He judges peoples and nations. He takes them down. He raises others up, but I'm part of the kingdom of God. My citizenship is in

heaven, and I await His return, but while I’m waiting, I’m going to get to work. I’m going to proclaim the gospel because I have the confidence and the faith of knowing that His kingdom will grow like a mustard seed throughout the world so that the birds of the nations can find shade in its branches.”

May God add his rich blessing not only to this passage but also to our hearts and lives as we seek to honor Jesus Christ, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.