

Returning Mark 13:24-37

November 5, 2023

(Prepared by John Black using LifeWay's ETB materials.)

Last Sunday, in chapter 11, we saw a fig tree serve as a symbol of the failed Jewish religious system that had a lot of leaves without much fruit. As believers, our lives can look the same if we are not careful. When left to our own, we can become like pretty trees with no fruit. We might look good, but are we fulfilling our created purpose?

As we move toward our lesson in chapter 13 it is important to note that Jesus has been busy in chapter 12 teaching through parables, such as the Wicked Vinedressers, the Pharisees wanting to know if it is lawful to pay taxes, the Sadducees confused about the resurrection when seven brothers had been married to the same wife. Perhaps the timeliest verses in chapter 12 concern the Scribes wanting to know which is the first commandment of all. I cannot help but believe the folks hating Israel today have no desire to consider this first commandment and it is just as evident they have given no consideration for the second commandment. I am certainly not trying to change our lesson focus for today, but I believe Mark 12:28-34 are worthy of a moment's consideration in light of our world's current events.

Chapter 13 begins with Jesus predicting that the massive walls of the temple would come down and the stones would be overturned one day. This revelation led to a deeper conversation about what would happen in the days to come. Verses 13:8-13 leading up to our study today lets us know that the days leading up to the end would be marked by violence and the world would be a place of intense suffering and tragedy.

Jesus promised to return for His followers. From page 91 in PSG. An empty promise, Yes or No. **How do we know God keeps His promises?** He promised Abraham that He would make the patriarch into a great nation. He promised that after the Israelites had spent years as slaves in Egypt, He would free them from their Egyptian overlords. He promised Moses that He would be with him when Moses confronted Pharaoh. He promised the Israelites that He would lead them to a land flowing with milk and honey. God promised through His prophets that He would send a redeemer to free people from sin and death. He has kept His promise to provide us with the gift of salvation.

One of the promises Jesus has made is that He will return to earth to gather all believers to Himself. As we read our scripture passages today, we can be encouraged to rest in the assurance that He will come again, just as He promised.

Read Mark 13:24-27 "Be Ready"

We should understand that "in those days" is not related to a particular day on the calendar but emphasizes that God's word is reliable and will come to pass. What Jesus was about to describe will happen "after that tribulation."

What will our day look like on the day the Lord returns? If the sun, moon, and stars no longer shine on the coming day of the Lord, you may need a flashlight. It's going to be dark unless the astronomical disturbances caused by the shaking of heaven create some kind of flashing light. Could there be lightning and thunder like we've never seen?

How does Jesus' second coming compare to His original arrival? This time He will be "coming in clouds with great power and glory." Everyone everywhere will behold Him. His power and glory will verify and proclaim His identity as Son of God, Messiah, and Lord over all creation. The whole world will know He has come. Quite a contrast to that first night spent in a Bethlehem manger.

Who are the "elect" the angels will be gathering? The elect is those who have a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. The elect is His, meaning Jesus' disciples. Jesus is coming for His own.

What is the promise in verse 27? The promise is that the angels will go from "the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven" to gather Jesus' disciples to Himself upon His return. One author noted that this will be the first time every member of Jesus' church will be together in one moment of time.

An interesting question on page 94 of the PSG poses the question, “What beliefs do you hear expressed about Jesus’ return?”

Read Mark 13:28-31 “Be Aware”

What is the fig tree telling us when it starts sprouting leaves? Summer is near, don’t know exactly when it will arrive, but the seasons are changing. Jesus wanted His disciples to understand that they could have the same confidence regarding His return after the end of the difficult days of tribulation.

What is “this generation?” This generation is the era that extends until His second coming. It continues to the present day. We are of that generation. Does not mean we will live until His second coming, but we are of that generation. Remember a couple of weeks back Jesus referred to a group of folks as an “unbelieving generation” (Mark 9:19).

What is the promise in verse 31? “My words will never pass away” is an eternal promise because they are the words of God. All His teachings are eternal so how can anyone think the Bible is out of date?

Read Mark 13:32-37 “Be Alert”

Why is attempting to anticipate the moment of Jesus’ return futile? Jesus tells us this time was only known by God the Father so attempting to determine that moment would be futile.

So, if Jesus is God and God is Jesus, why does only God and not Jesus know the time of His return? This is the same self-imposed limitations we saw a couple of weeks ago in Mark 10 when Jesus told the guys God was the only One who could assign the places of honor. One author says about Jesus, “Ignorance of certain things was simply part of Jesus’ humanity, a part of his becoming a real human being.”

Why did Jesus warn His disciples to “watch and be alert?” No one knows the exact time of His return but there was an appropriate time appointed by God the Father. With no one knowing the exact time, Jesus’ disciples need to always be prepared for Him to return at any time.

How does the parable in verse 34 relate to the unknow time of Jesus’ return? Just like the doorkeeper must stay alert, so too must Jesus’ disciples be vigilant and faithful in their labor for the kingdom as they await His return. Like the master who left his servants with the responsibility of taking care of his house, Jesus expects His disciples to continue with His work of spreading the gospel and making disciples until He comes for them. We must be vigilant because Jesus could return at any time.

Not knowing the time of Jesus’ return is no excuse for becoming apathetic and/or lazy in serving the Lord.

As we said at the start of class, one of the promises Jesus has made is that He will return to earth to gather all believers to Himself. We can rest in the assurance that He will come again, just as He promised.

Gene Thompson came across the following information from a pastor, Shawn Thomas. I have chosen to include this paragraph because it reinforces His promise that Jesus Christ will return personally and visibly in glory to the earth.”

Let me add this: people have a LOT of different beliefs about how the end times events will unfold, but as Baptists, we’ve never made a specific view of the end times a test of fellowship — in other words, we don’t fight and divide over our beliefs about the end. There are a lot of details and a lot of opinions about it. But I love our Baptist Faith & Message statement on the end times: “God, in His own time and in His own way, will bring the world to its appropriate end.” That leaves a lot of leeway for different viewpoints about the end. So don’t be too adamant about your personal viewpoint and try not to let others force their views on the end either. I think we’ve seen from history that we all need to exercise a little humility about it! What we DO need to believe is also in the next part of our BFM statement: “According to His promise, Jesus Christ will return personally and visibly in glory to the earth.” THAT’s what we must believe; He IS returning, personally and visibly! But as the statement says, it’s “in His own time, and in His own way.” I think that’s a great statement that we can all agree on — and you might plan to share it at some point in the lesson this week.