

Enduring to the End
Mark 13:1-13
ABC 5/5/24

When I began this series on Mark's gospel, there were some texts I knew would be difficult to preach. Mk 13 is one of them. It's been the subject of debate by theologians forever. End times passages can be polarizing among Christians but we can lovingly disagree with each other on many things about end times, but there's one thing that we all must agree on: Jesus will one day return to renew & restore all things, & that His followers will be with Him forever. I won't be able to answer all your questions about this text. What I can do is try my best to remain faithful to the text &, by God's grace, **teach what accords with sound doctrine** (Titus 2:1).

As the *theologians* from the band R.E.M. sang in 1987, *It's the end of the world as we know it, & I feel fine*. There's a natural curiosity about the end of the world. It's why many make predictions about when the end will come & why many fall for those predictions. Some of you remember the booklet, *88 Reasons the Rapture is in 1988*. Or more recently some thought 12/21/12 was the end of the world. No one has been right. Some take Mk 13 to be entirely future & others take it to be entirely past. How are we to interpret it? Clearly, it's a transition between the controversies in the temple (11:12–12:44) & the Passion events (chpts 14–15). At the beginning of these controversies, Jesus entered the temple (11:27; cf 11:11, 15). Now He leaves it for the last time in Mark's gospel. Doing so, He predicts the temple's destruction & delivers a discourse describing the signs & non-signs leading to the destruction of Jerusalem, the persecution of His followers, the worldwide proclamation of the gospel, the coming of the Son of Man, & the end of the age. Jesus' purpose isn't to provide a timetable for the future but to exhort us to faithful discipleship in the present.¹ Its central theme is a call for watchfulness, perseverance, & faithfulness in the face of coming crises (5, 9, 23, 33, 35, 37). The primary problem of Mk 13 comes from the fact that the disciples ask Jesus about the timing & signs related to the destruction of the temple. Jesus alludes to their question but also describes events related to His 2nd coming & the end of the age. It's hard to know when Jesus is talking about the destruction of Jerusalem & when He's talking about the end of the

¹ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, p 384

age. As I mentioned, some say the entire speech is related to the events surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. The coming of the Son of Man, in this case, wouldn't refer to Jesus' 2nd coming, but to the judgment of God witnessed in the destruction of the temple & Jerusalem. The problem is that some statements, such as the signs of vss 24–25 & the gathering of the elect by the angels in vs 27 seem to relate to the end of the age. Others see Mk 13 as related only to the end-times with no reference at all to the events of 70 AD. This, too, is unlikely. The whole speech comes from Jesus' prediction about the destruction of the temple (2) & the disciples' question about the timing & signs related to it (4). Certain descriptions, such as Jesus' warning to flee Judea (14–19) & the reference to **this generation** (30) seem to relate directly to the siege & destruction of Jerusalem. I believe Jesus addresses, in some sense, both events. The simplest solution seems to be to see vss 5–23 as generally referring to the coming destruction of Jerusalem & vss 24–37 generally referring to the return of the Son of Man & the end of the age. A problem with this is certain events in the 5-23 seem to relate to the end of the age & certain events of the 2nd seem to relate to the destruction of Jerusalem. A possible solution is a back-and-forth (A-B-A-B) pattern between the 2 events.² This approach provides an explanation for Jesus' perplexing saying that **this generation** will not pass away until these events occur (30). This makes sense if in vss 26–31 Jesus has moved away from the discussion of the Son of Man's return & the end of the age (24–27) & returned to the discussion of Jerusalem's destruction (14–23). This also resolves the apparent contradiction between vs 29 & vs 32. Although the destruction of Jerusalem will be preceded by signs & will occur within a generation, the timing of the return of the Son of Man is unknown to all & is still in the future. I believe Jesus is addressing the immediate context of the coming destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in 70 AD but He's also preparing us for His return with great power & glory. In other words, this passage isn't strictly future & it isn't strictly past, but is entirely relevant for us today. In these 1st 13 vss, Jesus gives us 4 commands that point us to the preserving grace of God in the midst of the trials & tribulation all followers of Jesus will face.

² Mark L. Strauss, *Mark*, p 565

1. Disciples' Statement As Jesus & the disciples are leaving the temple & heading to the Mt of Olives, a disciple remarks on the temple's magnificence as an expression of national pride. **1**

The massive temple complex, greatly expanded by Herod the Great, was one of the wonders of the ancient world. Work began about 20 BC & would continue until just before it was destroyed. It was built on a 300 X 500 meter platform covering 35 acres. Josephus describes its massive buildings & splendor, claiming that *the exterior of the building wanted nothing that could astound either mind or eye.*³ He says some of the stones used were 67 ft long.⁴ The southern end of the complex was dominated by Solomon's Colonnade, a covered portico made up of 162 forty-foot-high columns, set in 4 rows. These columns were so large that 3 men could barely join hands around the base.⁵ The temple was 150 ft tall with walls plated with gold which reflected the sun with *so fiery a flash that persons straining to look at it were compelled to avert their eyes as from solar rays.*⁶ A famous rabbinic proverb said, *He who has not seen the temple of Herod has never seen a beautiful building in his life.*⁷ **2**

2 Jesus' Prediction Jesus directs the disciples away from their pride in the temple & says it'll be destroyed. This is the 1st specific prediction of its destruction in Mark's gospel but Jesus' cleansing of the temple (11:15–17), cursing of the fig tree (11:12–14, 20–21), & the parable of the tenant farmers all imply coming judgment (12:1–12). Some see Jesus' claim that **not one stone will be left upon another** as problematic since some of the stones supporting the temple platform weren't torn down by Titus's troops. The so-called *Western* or *Wailing Wall* was part of the retaining wall of the temple complex. Perhaps Jesus is referring to the temple itself & not to the entire complex or its foundations. Another possibility is it simply means *total destruction* & shouldn't be read in a literal manner. Historically, the temple was certainly demolished & leveled to the ground. Josephus illustrates this when he says after the city's fall, Caesar ordered *the entire city & temple to be destroyed so that there was left nothing to make those that came thither believe it had ever been*

³ *Jewish Wars*, 5.5.1–8 §§184–246; *Antiquities*, 15.11.1–7 §§380–425

⁴ *Jewish Wars*, 5.5.6 §224

⁵ *Antiquities*, 15.11.5 §§413–414

⁶ *Jewish Wars*, 5.5.6 §§221–222

⁷ *Babylonian Talmud*, Baba Batra 4a

inhabited.⁸ Jesus sees past the surface & the shiny stones & massive structure & sees the misuse & abuse of its God-ordained purpose & declares judgment on it. To the disciples, if the temple was destroyed, it meant the end of the nation & the end of the age. They mistakenly viewed the destruction of the Temple, the revealing of the Messiah, & the end of the age as occurring simultaneously. They have no concept of the gap of time between the temple's destruction & Jesus' return. The temple belongs to an old order, whose builders will reject the stone that will become central to God's new temple. This temple has become obsolete & God will allow it to be utterly destroyed.⁹

3. Disciples' Questions The scene shifts as Jesus sits opposite the temple on the Mt of Olives. **3-4** 2 sets of brothers approach & question Him. They couldn't imagine a world without the temple. They believed that if the temple was destroyed it would be the end of time. In fact, Mt 24:3 records them, asking, **Tell us, when will these things happen, & what will be the sign of Your coming, & of the end of the age?** You can understand where the disciples are coming from. Jesus began His earthly ministry by declaring, **The time is fulfilled, & the kingdom of God is at hand** (Mk 1:15). They didn't think there'd be any time between the destruction of the temple & the consummation of the kingdom of God. It's what prompts them to ask Jesus 2 questions, the 1st concerning the timing of these events, the 2nd about the sign that will accompany them. In His answer Jesus gives 4 commands that find their immediate application in the time of the disciples but also apply to us today.

4. Jesus' Commands A. Do Not Be Misled 5

Jesus is saying there's the possibility of being led astray. In fact, one of His own disciples, Judas Iscariot, is led astray by the devil to betray Jesus. Jesus then explains why this is important: **6** False teachers will abound. In Acts 5:35-37, Gamaliel stands before the Jewish council, who was enraged at those who were preaching about Jesus, & gives a couple of examples of people being misled. He says,

⁸ *Jewish Wars*, 7.1.1. §§1-3; cf. 6.9.1 §413; 6.9.4 §434; 7.8.7 §§375-377

⁹ David E. Garland, *Mark*, p 491

Men of Israel, take care what you propose to do with these men. For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, & a group of about four hundred men joined up with him. But he was killed, & all who followed him were dispersed & came to nothing. After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census & drew away *some* people after him; he too perished, & all those who followed him were scattered.

In Acts 21:38 Paul is mistaken for an Egyptian who led 4,000 Jews into the wilderness in a messianic action of some kind. Jesus said some would rise up claiming to be the Messiah & they would mislead people. Jesus wants His disciples to beware of such false teachers. There have been many, & will be many more, who will lead people astray. This is the 1st of 2 warnings to watch out for messianic pretenders, which begin & end the 1st half of the discourse (5, 21–23). This implies the greatest danger to the disciples won't be persecution, though it will be severe (9–13), but deceivers & false teachers. The NT epistles witnessed an increase in false teachers in the latter part of the 1st century (2 Tim 4:3–4; 2 Pt 2; Jude; 1 Jn 2). False teachers are still with us today. Don't be led astray by false christs, false prophets, or false teachers. There are many who mislead, but we must remain vigilant, by reading our Bibles & praying for God to give us wisdom & discernment.

B. Do Not Be Frightened 7-8

During the years between Jesus' death & the destruction of the Temple, there was a terrible earthquake in Laodicea, Vesuvius buried Pompeii, & there was a famine in Rome itself. This didn't mean the end of all things. Neither would it mean the end if California fell into the sea today. The truth is, with the rise of every war & earthquake there comes an increase of false teachers who say they have the answer. We aren't to be deceived by any of this. These things are a result of man's sin & will continue to the end of time. Don't be frightened by them.¹⁰ Notice these are signs of the present age & do not indicate the end. Cataclysmic events that produce devastation are often mistaken for evidence that the end is near. *If my world is ending, the whole world must be ending.* For example, when war broke out between Israel & Hamas on 10/7/23 many churches linked it to the end times. One pastor said, *Things are falling into place for this great world battle, fought by the superpowers of the world, as the Bible said.*¹¹ Wars, earthquakes, plagues, & famine

¹⁰ R. Kent Hughes, *Mark: Jesus, Servant & Savior*, vol. 2, pp 137–138

¹¹ www.baptiststandard.com/news/faith-culture/evangelicals-see-israel-hamas-war-in-light-of-end-times/

are often associated with divine judgment in Scripture & the coming day of the Lord is often described with earthquakes & other disturbances. But Jesus says when you see such things, **do not be frightened** since **that is not yet the end**. These events don't herald the end of time but instead are part of the normal course of human history. He shows them that not everything that seems to be a sign of the end of the world is a sign.¹² That such events **must take place** means God is in sovereign control & is leading history to its proper end. Jesus says these events are merely the beginning of the **birth pangs**, imagery indicating intense suffering & anxious longing that will give way to the joy of birth (cf Jn 16:20–22; Rom 8:21–23; 1 Thes 5:3). All too often, we have the idea that a natural disaster, a war, or a pandemic means the end of the world is near. We tend to view the end of the world in light of what we're going through, as though this is the 1st time in history there's been something like this. Therefore, we must be close to the end. The reality is these are just the beginning of the birth pains. This was the case for the disciples in Jesus' day as they approached the destruction of the temple & this has been the case for the last 2,000 years. Rather than becoming preoccupied with these things, Jesus wants us to not be alarmed, but rather, to view these things as the beginning of birth pains.

C. Be On Guard 9

Jesus has warned of false messiahs (5–6) & disastrous events (7–8). This 3rd warning is of coming persecution (9–13). This is highlighted by 3 references to being delivered, handed over, & betrayed (9, 11, 12). The 1st refers to being handed over to religious & civil courts (9); the 2nd promises the Holy Spirit's presence when Jesus' followers are delivered up for trial (11); & the 3rd refers to family division, as brother betrays brother to persecution & even death (12–13). The **courts** refers not to the Sanhedrin but to local Jewish councils in towns & villages that generally met in synagogues. *Floggings* are 1st mentioned in Acts 5:40, where the apostles are ordered to be beaten by the Sanhedrin for preaching in Jesus' name. Paul repeatedly felt the wrath of local Jewish councils, & by the time he wrote 2 Cor (c 55–56 AD) he'd 5x **received from the Jews 39 lashes** (2 Cor 11:24). In addition to Jewish religious councils, the disciples will appear before secular rulers, **governors &**

¹² William Hendriksen & Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Mark*, p 516

kings. Jesus Himself will appear before the prefect Pontius Pilate (15:1–15) & before the Jewish tetrarch, Herod Antipas. In Acts, Paul appears before King Herod Agrippa I, Festus (Acts 25:13–26:32), Felix (23:24), & goes to Rome to appear before Rome’s ultimate king, Caesar himself (25:11–12; 27:24). Jesus’ statement that the disciples will be a **testimony to them** leads into the next sentence which speaks of the worldwide proclamation of the good news (10). Again, the immediate application of what Jesus is saying here is for the disciples. In our North American context, we aren’t being delivered over to Jewish councils. We aren’t appearing before governors & kings. & when was the last time you were beaten in a synagogue? But if you read through the book of Acts, everything Jesus is speaking about happens to the disciples. In vs 13, Jesus reiterates His point that **you will be hated by all because of My name.** We’re reminded of Christians around the world who are losing their lives for the sake of Jesus today. This persecution of the disciples would mean their forced dispersion, & thus the gospel would be preached to the Gentiles. **10**

This statement interrupts the flow of Jesus’ teaching, which otherwise would move smoothly from vs 9 to 11. But it’s important for Mark’s purpose. As in vs 7, **must** indicates God’s sovereign purpose & plan for human history. In common with Luke’s central theme of the book of Acts (1:8; 5:39; 28:31), for Mark the progress of the gospel is unstoppable because it’s the sovereign work of God. The point is the persecution described (9, 11–13) won’t stop the spreading of the gospel; in fact, it will promote it. A major question concerns whether **first** means that the worldwide proclamation of the gospel will occur before the destruction of Jerusalem or before Judgment Day. I believe it means the former. While it’s true that the gospel hadn’t yet been proclaimed to every person in the world by 70 AD, it had reached the civilized world. Paul, writing in the 50s & early 60s AD seems to take this view, speaking of the gospel’s proclamation **in all the world** (Col 1:6), **to all creation under heaven** (Col 1:23), & **to all the nations** (Rom 16:26). Mark’s statement parallels Luke’s purpose in Acts, where Paul’s arrival in Rome (28:31) marks the symbolic fulfillment of the commission to take the gospel from **Jerusalem ... to the remotest part of the earth** (Acts 1:8). This also argues against the claim by some that Mk 13:10 places a specific condition on the time of Christ’s return, namely, the evangelization of every people group around the globe. While I strongly insist the need to finish

the task of worldwide evangelism & to obey Christ's commission to take the gospel to every nation, tribe, & person (Mt 28:18–20; Acts 1:8), I don't think this vs gives this qualification. The timing of the end depends entirely on God, not on any human activity, including our proclaiming of the gospel. Believers are commanded to proclaim the gospel to all people everywhere, yet to live a life of constant readiness for Christ's return. How does it happen that the gospel spreads like this? Jesus tells us how that happens, in **vs 11**.

D. Do Not Worry Jesus resumes His discussion of persecution. When the disciples are *arrested* or *handed over* (9, 11) & brought to trial for their faith, they need not be anxious, since the Holy Spirit will give them words to speak. The background for this may be found in Moses' & Jeremiah's reluctance to be God's spokesmen (Ex 4:10–17; Jer 1:6–9) & God's promise to **teach you what you are to say** (Ex 4:12) & to **put My words in your mouth** (Jer 1:9). The fulfillment of this promise is seen in Acts, where the apostles, though **uneducated & untrained men** (Acts 4:13), proclaim the gospel with boldness & eloquence by the Spirit's power (Acts 2:4; 4:8, 31; 6:10). Significantly, the promise here is for the right words to speak, not for physical protection or escape. They're to follow the lead of Jesus, proclaiming the gospel boldly whatever the cost. The promise is for those whose sudden arrest makes preparation for their defense impossible. They're to trust the Holy Spirit for divine guidance. The good news that God has put His Spirit in those who've trusted in Jesus doesn't mean they'll never be persecuted, experience war, famine, political unrest, or the pain of losing their family for Jesus' sake. What it means is that God will give us the endurance to persevere when these things come upon us. He will keep us to the end. That's the promise of God. But this promise came at a cost. God the Father sent His Son, Jesus, into the world. Jesus would experience the worst suffering imaginable. He'd be crucified on a Roman cross, which was bad enough but He'd also fully satisfy the wrath of God against our sin. In order for sinful humanity to be in the presence of our holy God, we needed our sin problem dealt with, by the perfect, sinless Christ. This is why He came. Jesus continues, **12**.

These severe trials & persecution will even divide families with intense personal hatred. Christians will be betrayed by family. This recalls Micah's words, **For son treats father contemptuously,**

Daughter rises up against her mother, Daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; A man's enemies are the men of his own household (Mic 7:6; cf Is 19:2). This betrayal can lead even to execution. Though such betrayals aren't mentioned in the NT, Roman historian Tacitus describes how in the early 60s during Nero's persecution of Christians, many were convicted & executed on the testimony of family.¹³ **13**

Beyond family conflicts, Jesus' followers **will be hated by all**. Total allegiance to Jesus results in hatred from the general public. Yet during this persecution & hatred is the promise of salvation. 2 questions arise here. What is **the end**, & is being **saved** spiritual or physical? The **end** could be 1) the destruction of Jerusalem, 2) the end of the age, when the Son of Man returns, or 3) the end of life, having stayed faithful through many trials. The 1st two would indicate physical deliverance, either escape from the destruction of Jerusalem (14–19) or preservation until the coming of the Son of Man (13:26–27). The 3rd would be spiritual, inheriting eternal life by remaining faithful to the end. This seems most likely, especially since death is mentioned in the immediate context (12). Those who are martyred for their faith will be spiritually saved. This also fits Jesus' teaching in 8:35 that those who lose their lives will gain true life. Promises of salvation for those who endure are common in Scripture. 2 Tim 2:12 says, **If we endure, we will also reign with Him**. Rather than being discouraged by persecution, we're to persevere. The Christian life isn't a sprint but a marathon.

Applying all of this can be complicated since 3 audiences must be kept in mind: the original hearers of Jesus, the church of Mark's day, & ourselves. Jesus is speaking 1st to His disciples yet Mark is also addressing the Roman church which was facing the same prospect of persecution & martyrdom. Finally, we must determine how these truths apply to us today. Common themes that apply to all 3 audiences are the need for spiritual diligence, warnings against false teachers, the danger of end-time passion, & the reality of persecution. The repeated refrain throughout this discourse & its central theme is to *be aware* & to *watch out* or *be prepared*. Jesus' disciples are to be aware of deceivers & know that wars & natural disasters aren't necessary signs of the end.

¹³ *Annals*, 15.44.4

They must be ready to face persecution, suffering, & even betrayal by friends & family. Followers of Jesus must beware of their place in salvation history, that we're living in the **end times** between the 1st & 2nd coming of Christ. Readiness means the ability to discern truth from error. There were certainly false prophets leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem but Jesus' warning looks beyond that event to the reality of false teachers & prophets throughout history. This can be as explicit as a cult leader like David Koresh, who claimed messianic authority over his followers or as subtle as a church leader whose followers are encouraged to devote unquestioned allegiance to his teachings. Paul addresses the danger of this in 1 Cor, where the church in Corinth was divided into factions around Peter, Apollos, & Paul himself. Paul is appalled at such disunity & strongly responds, **Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he?** (1 Cor 1:12-13). The focus & center of our faith must be Christ Himself, not any human leader. Again, Jesus takes time to warn against the *non-signs* that don't signal the end, including false messiahs, wars, earthquakes, famines, & persecution (6-11). Our natural tendency is to believe that catastrophic events are signs of the end of the world. There's a huge industry pushing the *keys* to Bible prophecy & promoting end-time speculation. Self-proclaimed experts point to contemporary events as sure signs that the end of the world is near. The sad fact is that all such predictors have been proven false throughout history, resulting in disappointment, confusion, & even loss of confidence in biblical authority. While most prophetic speculators avoid specific date setting,¹⁴ there's still a tendency to read the Bible through the lens of today's headlines. We should know better. Even in a passage full of images like this one, the message isn't to calculate the end, but always to be alert & ready, living a life of spiritual preparation. Similarly, in Acts 1, when Jesus was asked by His disciples after His resurrection whether He'd **at this time** restore the kingdom to Israel, He responded, **It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority.** Instead, they were to be His *witnesses* from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:6-8). The church's role is to proclaim the gospel, not speculate about the end. Is it the end of the world as we know it? I think we can safely say that it's been the end of the world for nearly 2,000

¹⁴ A well-publicized exception was Harold Camping's prediction that Jesus would return on May 21, 2011

years. & yet, as Christians, we can confidently say, *I feel fine*, because our hope is in God, who is sovereign over all, & who holds all things in the palm of His hand, & who has given us His Word that we might endure to the end.

Jesus would die for sin, but He wouldn't stay dead. 3 days later, He'd rise from the dead in victory over sin & death & Satan. He would ascend to the right hand of God the Father, from where He will one day come to restore all things to how they were intended to be. This is the good news of Jesus Christ that we receive by faith. If you haven't believed this good news, then I encourage you to turn away from your sin & trust in Jesus, today. If your hope isn't in God, then you'll have nothing to hold on to when judgment greater than the destruction of the temple comes. As Christians, are we holding onto the promise that **the one who endures to the end ... will be saved**. Are we drawing near to Jesus, in the midst of our suffering & trials & persecution? Are we faithfully waiting for Jesus to return to make all things right? Are we trusting Him with every natural disaster & war & persecution? Is He our suffering Savior, who died to make us right with God, & is He our conquering King, who reigns that we may reign with Him, forever? Despite the coming deception, disasters, & distress, Jesus' words assure us the gospel will prevail. Throughout the remainder of history, God will be at work in the hearts of His children: saving them from sin, empowering them for service, & preserving them for glory (cf Mk 13:20).¹⁵ No matter how chaotic the world becomes, the redemptive chain of Rom 8 can never be broken:

These whom He predestined, He also called; & these whom He called, He also justified; & these whom He justified, He also glorified.... For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate Christians from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom 8:30, 38–39).

Pray/Communion

In Matthew's account of the Last Supper, first communion, Jesus ends it by saying, **I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom (Mt 26:29)**. That's what we have to look forward to if we **endure to the end**. In the

¹⁵ John MacArthur, *Mark 9–16*, p 239

meantime, we're to be alert, on our guard, so as to not be misled, frightened, or worried about the chaos around us. PASS ELEMENTS

While they were eating, Jesus took *some* bread, & after a blessing, He broke *it* and gave *it* to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is My body" (Mt 26:26).

As we remember Jesus' atoning sacrifice, taking the punishment for our sins upon the cross, we joyfully & thankfully eat of the bread.

When He had taken a cup & given thanks, He gave *it* to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins (26:27-28).

As we joyfully & thankfully remember Jesus blood, His death, for the forgiveness of our sins, we drink of the cup together.