

All right. Let's open our Bibles this morning to Mark 13:28 as we continue with Mark through the gospel that he wrote.

We are currently with Jesus and four of His disciples - at least four of them - up on the Mount of Olives, across from the Temple area in Jerusalem on late Tuesday night of Passion Week. Mark had begun, in chapter 11, to give us the details of all of the days and the activities of that final week of ministry - highlighting, of course, His official presentation to the nation as their Messiah on Palm Sunday; the cleansing of the Temple on Monday; the long day of confrontations with different groups that looked to expose Him as a fraud to the people on Tuesday. And the last thing Jesus did on Tuesday was to sit in the Court of the Women, there where the offering plates were, and watch a widow give her livelihood to the Lord. And Jesus was so encouraged by this woman's faith. She had so little, and yet she gave all. And we talked that week about giving in God's viewpoint, and there were only two things that God really uses to measure our giving. One is the attitude of the heart - how I give, and then, second of all, what it costs me. If it doesn't cost me anything, it doesn't impress Him much. So it's a matter of sacrifice and love. So it's the attitude of the heart and then the proportion that God is interested in.

Well, walking out of the Temple that late afternoon - and maybe we think the disciples, maybe, sensed some resignation in His heart; I mean, this was the last day He would be in town to minister to others - they mentioned to Jesus the magnificence of this Temple that Herod had been remodeling for years and was still in progress, how glorious it looked. They mentioned it here in verse 1 of this chapter. And yet Jesus' answer perplexed them. He said, "Do you see how beautiful these stones are? There will not be one stone left upon another." And so, by the time they walked the mile and a half or so up the other side and sat down, these men came to Jesus, and they asked Him when would this happen. In fact, between this and Matthew's and Luke's gospel, they asked Him three questions. They were pretty much the same. When will this take place? What will be the signs of Your coming? What will be the signs of the end of the age?

Very long sermon, certainly the longest one in Mark. Matthew covers it in two chapters - 24 and 25, Luke 21 as well. But it is a prophetic chapter where Jesus seeks to answer the questions of these men - Jewish men about a Jewish city and their future with the Messiah. And we mentioned to you for the last two weeks that we've gone through this chapter (we'll finish it this morning), but I want to mention it to you again. The most important thing you can know about going in to study these chapters, in whatever gospel you are, is that these men, along with the nation that they belonged to, absolutely believed that when the Messiah came, they would immediately take over the world. Rome would be out of business. Whatever enemy they had would be put aside. And they would instantly find themselves ruling and reigning, which is why you find so much argument amongst them through the gospels about position - who's going to get what position of greatness. To them, the destruction of the Temple suggested war that they could not lose, that the Messiah would absolutely take over, and they would emerge victorious. They didn't see a Church Age. They didn't understand the difference between the first and second coming of Christ; we've talked a lot about that in Jesus' talks with His disciples. And so the context is absolutely critical to keep in mind. This is a road map for the future for His own and His response to these Jewish men about their city and their Messiah and their future. It's important that you understand that they thought it would come immediately.

For the past few weeks, as we've been studying, in fact, in the first thirteen verses or so, Jesus only addresses the fact that there's going to be a time gap. It's not going to be immediate. And He reminds them of that through saying, "There're going to be false Messiahs coming and going. Be careful. Don't follow them. That's not Me. They're going to tell you they've been sent. They haven't. There're going to be wars, and there're going to be rumors of wars. There're going to be kingdoms rising up against kingdoms. There's going to be the beginning of sorrows." Even the suffering and arrest that He talks to them about (towards the end of that first portion) can easily be applied to almost every generation.

There are three specific times when God deals with Israel as a nation. One is the 70 A.D. overthrow of the nation, where they are dispersed. The second is when the rapture of the church comes, that then God will begin to deal with them and through them again. And then, of course, there's that word to the Church Age, to you and me, as believers, who are not Israel but yet who are in the middle of that timeframe, that Age of Grace, between the destruction of Jerusalem and then the return of the Lord after the seven-year Tribulation and then His rule and reign.

Last time, beginning in verse 14, we looked specifically at Jesus' words to the nation regarding the Great Tribulation. He called it the "abomination of desolation." He quoted out of Daniel 9. It is a reference to the middle of the seven-year period where the Antichrist, who's been a friend to Israel or so it seems, turns out to be the devil, and he comes to the Temple that he has allowed to have been rebuilt and been a part in and demands worship under threat of death, if he's not worshipped; and then that warning to leave town and to flee to that place that God has prepared. And the Lord said to them, towards the end of this portion, "I've told you ahead of time so you know to be ready and to be careful."

Well this morning we want to finish, beginning in verse 28, with the Lord's final words in this regard. In fact, we will move ahead to the preparation of the Passover next week - that's Thursday. So Wednesday is pretty much left out of sight. But the last words that the Lord has to these disciples about this future is that they should be ready. In fact, if you want to read through Matthew 25 on your own, there are a couple of parables there that the Lord tells that Mark doesn't cover. But they are designed to say one thing - you've got to be ready. You just have to be ready. And so, as the sun is setting on Tuesday, Jesus concludes His words with these men, and this very well might have rolled over into Wednesday, if you will, by the time the sun had set.

Verse 28, Jesus said, " 'Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender, and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see these things happening, know that it is near - at the doors! Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.' "

We've mentioned to you, in times past, the parable was a teaching tool that Jesus employed a lot, especially as the enemy began to gather steam. And it is really a teaching tool of comparison where the Lord takes physical truths that we understand well - can see and talk about, relate to - and He sets them next to spiritual things that you wouldn't otherwise understand or know so that, as you make the comparison between the two, they become more clear to you. The Lord used them to make things clearer to the disciples. He also used them to hide the truth from those who were His enemies so they wouldn't have to be even more responsible for what they knew.

So, here's a parable, and the Lord calls it just that. Here's an illustration, a comparison, and He uses the fig tree as the comparison. Now, back in chapter 11, when Jesus cursed the fig tree on a Monday morning, heading into Jerusalem, we talked to you about the fact that the fig tree and the vineyard and the olive tree are all used symbolically in the Bible to talk about national Israel - them as a nation. And, if you want to read something, Isaiah 5 and Jeremiah 24 are notable kinds of places where the Lord uses them in great detail. But you might remember, when we were back in Mark 11, that the Lord got up, and He saw afar off what would have been spring fruit. He saw leaves on the trees of a fig tree and thought, "Well, there should be some fruit," and there wasn't; and He cursed it, and in so doing in explaining that He had come to Israel, had chosen her to be a nation, she wasn't bearing fruit, He was going to take from her and give to a nation that would bear fruit. He tells the same parable in Mark 12, the first twelve verses, and we went through those pretty carefully as well.

So we live in this age now, the Church Age, where God isn't dealing with Israel as a nation. He's just reaching out through the gospel and through His people, through the church - Jew, Gentile, doesn't matter - and then one day, when you are taken out, He will turn again and speak to Israel as a nation, or through them again.

But I don't think that's how that is used here. I don't think the fig tree is, here, used symbolically. It is far more obvious it is being used agriculturally. In fact, if you read Luke 21:29, He says, "Take the lesson from the fig tree, oh, just look at all of the trees." And Luke kind of takes it out of the this-must-be-symbolically-speaking-of-the-nation. So he's using an agricultural example to agricultural people to try to drive home the fact that you can recognize the times in which you live, even as you can recognize the time of year that it is by looking at the production of fruit on different kinds of trees. So there's no typology here. This is just a straight parable between the physical and the spiritual.

Jesus ends His talk to these guys by saying, "You've got to be ready. You've got to be able to recognize the nearness of the days in which you live by the signs that precede them or that usher them in." The fig tree was certainly the most predominant tree in the Judean landscape; it still is. And everyone knew what it looked like and how it would produce fruit, and the apostles would have no trouble understanding this lesson. There are leaves and buds on the shoots of the fig tree on last year's fruit that grow in April, and they come out of the same kind of shoot that the fruit from the previous year grew. And it isn't until summer that, then,

they get new shoots and new leaves and new fruit; so, easily identifiable. So Jesus' point is pretty simple. You can easily tell the seasons by the condition of the fig tree or of all the trees, as Luke says, for that matter. "Let the signs that I've laid out before you prepare you for the times in which you live. Be ready so you can tell what's going on."

In fact, verse 29 says, " 'So you also, when you see these things happening, know that it is near - at the doors!' " Luke writes in verse 28 of chapter 21, " 'Now when you see these things begin to happen' " Now the words "see these things," "*ginomai*," is a present-tense participle in Greek, which means in the present tense. In your lifetime, when you see these things begin to unfold, while you are alive, then, from a generic standpoint - generally, specifically - if you experience these things, know of the times in which you live. All of the signs tell us of the times and the seasons. I think, and I've said before, Israel being back in the land is the greatest sign this generation has ever had. I mean, that hasn't happened for 1900 years. But they're there. There is this huge move and formation of a power base in Europe that will help the Antichrist, I think, come to power. There is tremendous conflict in the land of the Mideast. Israel is hated by everyone, and yet they have really no natural resources to steal. If you really want to go after land for gain, you go after Saudi Arabia or somebody that's got a lot of oil. You don't go after Israel who has a hard time keeping their water for the summer time. There's a move in Israel for a new Temple. There's the radicalization of terror that is certainly pointed at their direction, and everyone else. So you can begin to look around and go, "Yeah, there're some leaves on the tree." We might be living in the last days. There's an increase in famine, there's an increase in earthquakes on record in frequency, there's an increase in pestilence with all of the viruses around the world. Birth pangs is what the Lord called them in Luke. You're gettin' close, and if we wait a few more months, you look a lot more pregnant than you did before. And kind of that's the way the world looks. In the case of the Great Tribulation that leads to the second coming of Jesus, it doesn't begin until the church is raptured. So, when these things are happening, "at the door" for you is much more even so than for those who will live through that time.

Verse 30 is an interesting verse because it says, " '..... this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.' " The word "generation" is the Greek word "*genea*," which is always translated, in the Bible, race or nation. If that is the way Jesus is using it here, then He promises quite a miracle because the nation of Israel was about to be dispelled from their country and scattered and

the Diaspora dispersed throughout the world, and they would have no place to call home for almost 1900 years. Historically, no ethnic group has ever been able to maintain a national identity for more than five generations. If someone does not have a homeland for 200 years, they disappear. Just the way things work. You're absorbed into the culture and the climate, and the kids and grandkids and the great-grandkids learn a different language, and they lose sight of their heritage, and it just kind of goes away. They can't produce citizens after a nationality. They're swallowed up by new customs and all. So, that's why you don't have any Babylonians today, and you don't have any Assyrians today. It was a great concern, for many years, for the Armenian people to seek their own independent land and home for their people, and it should be; and they have that now. But that's always a danger. And yet Israel's a unique nation because God chose them and promised to keep them. They had no place to call home, no place to maintain nationalistic practices - from 70 A.D. to 1948. That's a long time, and yet somehow they were able to maintain their separateness, to maintain their Judaism, to maintain their monotheistic outlook, even surviving an attempted extermination less than 75 years ago, where there were people hell bent on destroying them completely. Today, there is a land of Israel, and the people are coming home. Over 55% of every Jew in the world lives in Israel now. There's a resurgence of Hebrew spoken. There's a nationalism that I don't think we've seen in generations. And if that's the way the Lord is using this word "generation" - to speak of the nation itself or the race itself - then God promises to maintain them during this long period that the apostles didn't see, this Church Age that is winding down, and they won't disappear. This generation will not pass away. They will not be swallowed up. They will make it through to that time. If that's how the Lord is using the word, it is a glorious miracle. If Jesus is using this term "generation" in terms of time being a generation, the Bible - if you're going to use it to define a generation - has a generation as short as 38 years and as long as 100 years and called it a generation. That's the way I know that I was taught when I was younger, as a Christian. If that's the case, even better. Then we realize that this purpose of God is to say once this all begins, it will be over quickly.

And I think both hold merit. It is soon. We are in a generation of that time. It is amazing. We see a race of people that survived almost 1900 years and find themselves thriving again. Not worshipping God, mind you, for the most part, but there because God has made a choice in regards to their future. So I think both have merit. It's an interesting promise there. It is hard to assign either race or time to it. Both of them work.

By comparison, verse 31, " 'Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.' " "You can count on my words." Jesus adds this promise. "My word will last." You can look back and see that every promise regarding the overthrow in Jerusalem in 70 A.D. was fulfilled. The keeping of Israel all over these generations has been fulfilled. And heaven and earth, which we can only see, is now passing away as we sit and wait for the Lord to come. Heaven and earth will decay, pass away. You know, everything that you see is rotting away. You know that. If you've taken any kind of physics class or learned about the second law of thermodynamics, you know that everything's in a state of decay - entropy, most randomness - that's where molecules and atoms tend to go. So our sun loses 1.3 million tons of mass every second; comes to us in the form of energy from 93 million miles away. It's irretrievable though, it's irreplaceable. It's not getting put back. Our brilliant scientists tell us we only have 10 billion years of light left, so if there's something you want to worry about, start with that! (Laughing) But we read, there in 2 Peter 3:10, "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up." And later in Revelation 21:1, about "a new heaven and a new earth." So the Lord's promise is, "My Word is going to last through all that you see and all that you know and all that you understand." So we best hang on to what He said. It's the most eternal thing you have in your possession is what God has said. It'll even make it through all of the purging, if you will.

Verse 32, " 'But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is.' " We come to Jesus' final words before His move to the last supper, really, and the lesson is driven home by this issue of - act according to what you know. If you see the signs of the times, live in readiness, live in anticipation, live in expectation. You've got to watch, and be ready. One of the things I remember, as a young Christian in the early 70's, was there was a real atmosphere of expectation of the Lord's return. And then it kind of just got away from the church, I think. I don't know what we did. I guess we were more interested in politics than in Jesus' coming. But for whatever reason, it kind of got out of vogue, at least in the eyes of God's people, and it shouldn't really be out of vogue. That should be a driving force in our lives always, that the Lord is going to be coming, and it could be today. We know that the only event in the prophetic calendar of God, and the only event that we cannot determine timewise, is the rapture. Once the rapture takes place, I can tell you the day that the Antichrist is

going to come to the Temple and say, "I'm God, worship me." And I can tell you the day that the Lord is going to come back with His church and say, "That's enough." Because all of those things are determined by that seventieth seven-year period that Daniel talks about. The only thing that has no attachment of time to it is God coming to get the church and God coming to gather us together. We can't know for sure the day or the hour, but we can know what Jesus said - the times in which we live, the signs that we see, the ability to look around and go, "Man, everything's kind of in place now for Him to come. Nothing needs to be yet fulfilled." The rapture is the only surprise event. It's the suddenness of it, the fact that there will be many folks that will be taken unaware because of it, that whole description about, "Watch therefore, you neither know the day or the hour that the Lord is coming. He can come like a thief in the night." But that's describing the surprise of the world who's not expecting Him. "That day shouldn't overtake you like a thief," the Lord says to the church. So the illustrations that follow Jesus' words in this Olivet Discourse (here in Matthew, here in Mark, and Luke as well), they always bear the same message - you don't know when it will be, you know the times of the seasons, you don't know the day or the hour. You can't go, "Well, it'll be Tuesday, I've got it all figured out." But Paul said it's like this pregnant woman, 1 Thessalonians 5:3, "For when they say, 'Peace and safety!' then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape." So, be ready. It's always that "be ready." I think you would do well to get up every morning and say, "Maybe today the Lord is coming." He could come today. We don't know of the delivery day, but we do know that the more pregnant the world looks, the more ready we can be.

Now notice what Jesus said here. He said that of that day and that hour, the angels in heaven don't know it, the Son doesn't know it, only the Father knows it. Well, okay, that's Jesus speaking in terms of His flesh. He emptied Himself. He knows now. He's God. But in terms of, "My Father is greater than I," that position He took as our Servant in His flesh, He didn't know either. He lived like we live, then. He's our example. We need to be ready. So, verse 33, " 'Take heed," (four times - verse 5, verse 9, verse 23, verse 33). Watch and pray. Be careful. Know that it's coming. Know that it's coming.

And Jesus ends here with a quick story, that is only found in Mark, to highlight our need to be watchful. He says in verse 34, " 'It is like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch. Watch therefore, for you do not know when

the master of the house is coming - in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning - lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!' " The Lord has left. He's left the work of the church in the hands of His servants. But we are also the ones that are to watch for His coming. We're the ones that are ushering people into the kingdom and showing them who the Door is. But we've got an eye on the skies - the Lord is coming for us. Present tense, by the way. The word "watch," in every one of these examples, is in the present tense. And notice He mentions four night watches - the Jews have three, the Romans had four. Mark is primarily writing to Gentiles, so he says evening, midnight, the crowing of the rooster (before dawn), or even in the morning - whenever He's coming. And you don't even have the assurance of falling asleep for a while. "Just be watching. Keep your eyes open. Be moved by what you see." And He wasn't just saying this to four guys. He was saying, "I'm tell you what I would tell everyone, what I would say to all." Notice verse 37. You've got to watch, you've got to be ready, you've got to be ready to stand before the Lord. You've got to be ready for His coming because that's what we're waiting for.

You can read the same call to readiness in the parables that Matthew speaks about in Matthew 25, or at the end of chapter 24 there're seven or eight verses there which Mark doesn't cover which have everything to do with, "Get your eyes up, man. Start looking around." In Luke 21, this is what the Lord said as He ended this sermon there. Verse 34, " 'But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.' " Be ready. Take heed. The words "take heed," we said, were four times in that one chapter; they're found sixteen times in these chapters having to do with the coming of the Lord, in all of the gospels. Jesus has told us the Great Tribulation will precede His coming, that the rapture comes first, that we don't know the day or the hour. So we should be awake. Don't ease up. Don't snooze, you lose. Right? Be ready when the Lord is coming. Don't get weary in waiting. And notice, even in Luke here, He gives three things that He says can weigh your waiting down. He says there can be a carousing - it's a medical term that means nausea, and it is usually used, in the Bible, to speak of overindulgence like Alka Seltzer, "I need some Alka Seltzer. I had a little too much to eat or to drink." Drunkenness speaks of a life that checks out, a life of the flesh. Those are usually not areas that you equate with believers, hopefully, overdoing it. But

the third one says or that the cares of this life slow you down so you're not looking up. And the word "cares" is that same word almost found everywhere in the Scriptures that means worry - worry about food and rent and clothing and life and the way of life; when the answer Jesus gave us was seek His kingdom and His righteousness and then everything else, He'll give you (Matthew 6:33). Don't worry! That's something Christians certainly can do, and they seem to be good at it. Don't worry! Jesus wants you to have peace, and the one area that you'll find Christians stumbling in, or becoming sidetracked in, "Hey, the Lord's coming." "I've got more important things to think about." Really?! Not really. Watch for His coming. Worry can wear you out, man. It'll take your mental outlook and spiritual edge away so quickly. Luke writes, as Jesus is preaching, "Be careful that that Day doesn't overtake you unexpectedly," which is kind of what Mark is saying now.

So, you've got a lot to go on, as a church. I mean, if you look at the world today, and I would say focus on the Holy Land - that's where God has placed His promises, through whom He will reach the world, where He will return, where His throne will be established. It required Israel to be in the land. They are. They're not leaving. Everyone wants them out. They're planning (in Paris today) a two-state solution. Everybody thinks that's a good idea except the Jews who live there. So, Israel's not attending the meetings. But it's fascinating to watch in light of being a believer, in light of all these things developing. So, the signs are ahead of us. The prerequisites for many of them are now in place. I think you just have to be alert daily. And then, when the Lord takes you, Luke says what we just read, then His coming becomes a snare to the whole earth for judgment. You get to leave because you're His people. Judgment falls upon those who are not His people. So stay awake, and watch and pray, because you don't want God to surprise you when He comes. It is, by the way, another reason to reject the foolish notion that the rapture will occur after the Tribulation - sometimes called the post-Tribulation rapture idea. Because if that were the case, you wouldn't have to be ready. You could just count off the days on a calendar. And you wouldn't have to be looking for Jesus Christ, you could look for the Antichrist because he'd come well before you salvation would, or your deliverance. But Jesus says here you can escape, you can prayerfully watch, and if you're "counted worthy" - interesting words - deemed deserving of deliverance. Isn't that something? That's what those words mean - "counted worthy." Pray that you be "counted worthy." How does that happen? Well, that happens when you give your life to Christ, right? "There're a few that have been counted worthy in Sardis," Jesus said (Revelation 3:5) "they haven't

defiled their garments. They're going to walk with Me in white. They're going to be the believers."

So, Tuesday night kind of finishes - rolling into Wednesday morning, if you will - with the Lord's final words to His people in regards to their future. A lot of it has to do with us, though it isn't spoken directly to us. It's spoken directly to the nation. Its primary application is to the Jews during the 70 A.D. trial that they would face, the dispersion, and then the "abomination of desolation" that takes place in the middle of the *Great Tribulation*. These are warnings to a nation that God has chosen. But they're given to us to be ready. Jesus said, "What I'm saying to you, I'm saying to everyone." That includes you. You've got to be ready, and we need to be ready because the rapture is that unmarked day in God's calendar that we just need to be looking forward to. And looking forward to it, we will.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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