

Bible Study Guide: Week of 11-23-2020

1. Read through the passage below
2. Read my notes and commentary
3. Read the questions at the end and ponder or discuss with others

Pastor Andrew

Mark 13:24-37

[Jesus said:] ²⁴“In those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, ²⁵and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

²⁶Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in clouds’ with great power and glory. ²⁷Then 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.

²⁸“From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. ²⁹So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. ³⁰Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. ³¹Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

³²“But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. ³⁴It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. ³⁵Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, ³⁶or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. ³⁷And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”

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This passage consists of three separate sections. The first, above, consists of a continuation of a discussion that began between Jesus and the disciples in 13:1. When a disciple noted to Jesus how impressive the Temple structure was, Jesus asserted that “not one stone would be left upon another; all would be cast down.” The disciples asked Jesus when this would happen and what sign(s) would accompany this catastrophic event. In response, Jesus warned the disciples of both public or world-wide calamities (wars and rumors of wars, earthquakes, and famines) as well as personal calamities specific to the disciples (persecutions, conflict within synagogues and families). So in v. 24 when Jesus says “after that suffering...” he is referring back to these warnings from earlier in the chapter. The heavenly bodies (sun, moon, and stars) failing to shine or falling from the sky would have been events seen as omens in the ancient world. It is not clear how long after the suffering Jesus described this will happen—whether it is something Jesus expected to occur in the near future or rather at the end of time. Parts of this chapter of Mark

seemed to come to pass when Jerusalem was sacked by the Romans in 70 AD; other parts seem to anticipate a coming “end of the world” scenario that has yet to play out. Here, the references to the coming of the Son of Man and the gathering of God’s chosen ones (elect) seem to anticipate a “not yet” scenario of the last judgment.

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This second part of the passage is a simple illustration or a miniature parable—just as the blooming of certain plants marks the start of certain seasons, so will the preceding “things” Jesus mentioned above indicate the nearness of whatever time Jesus is referring to. The Greek phrase rendered here as “he is near” can also be translated as “it is near.” The reference is not clear. “He” could mean the Son of Man, certainly. If we translate it as “it is near,” “it” may refer to a coming force or army (the conquering Roman legions, perhaps?) or “it” could be referring simply to the time Jesus has been talking about. Vs. 30 and 31 provide both a warning and word of comfort, yet they muddy the water even further when it comes to making sense of this passage. Jesus’ words in v. 30 seem to anticipate at least some of those present with Jesus living to see “the end.” If by “the end” we mean “the end of the world,” we know that this particular generation Jesus is speaking of did indeed pass away without witnessing “the end.” If by “the end” we mean “the end of the temple and Jerusalem as Jesus knew it,” likely some of those with Jesus did live to see that take place in 70 AD. Regardless of how we interpret this verse, his words in v. 31 make the point clearly: regardless of what happens, Jesus words will have everlasting value.

³²“But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. ³⁴It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. ³⁵Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, ³⁶or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. ³⁷And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”

The third part of this passage urges us to refrain from worrying about the details or timetables of the end times. Rather, we are to “keep alert; keep awake; be on guard.” Jesus calls his disciples to mindful readiness to face whatever comes our way—whether it is famines or persecutions; conquering armies or signs in the heavens.

Discussion/Reflection Questions:

- 1. What does it mean to you to “be alert” or to “keep awake” in your daily life?**
- 2. Why do you think we begin Advent (and a new church year) with this passage from near the end of Mark’s gospel about the “end times?”**
- 3. Why do you think so many Christians spend time writing and thinking and worrying about “the last days” when Jesus himself has said that not even the Son knows the day or the hour? If we are not called to worry about the timing of Jesus’ return, what are we called to do in our lives?**