



CANYON HILLS

COMMUNITY CHURCH

Series: The Book of Mark

April 29, 2018

Ready or Not

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Let's take our Bibles now and open them to the gospel of Mark. We have worshiped our sovereign God, we have prayed to our sovereign God, and now our sovereign God wants to talk to you and me. He wants us to hear his Word, to understand it, to know it, and to trust it, and so we're going to turn to it right now, in the gospel of Mark.

Last week, we arrived at chapter 13. This chapter clearly comes at a point where the Jews have absolutely rejected Jesus as their Messiah. They're even now accusing him of being possessed by the Devil or being the Devil himself. All that's left now for the rest of the gospel of Mark is for them to destroy Jesus, to kill him.

The question Mark will continue to answer and still has to answer (we're not there yet, but we will be as we go verse by verse through the end of the gospel) is, now that the King and his kingdom is truly rejected by the people he came to save, will God abandon his promise to save mankind from their sin? We know the answer to that on this side of the cross, but it was certainly a question they had to figure out for themselves in real time, and we'll get to that as we move our way through the rest of the gospel.

Today, we come to two days before Jesus is going to be crucified on a cross. He meets with his disciples on this little mount, the little Mount of Olives, they call it, in Jerusalem, across from the temple. While they're sitting there, Jesus reveals the most startling, significant, and I would even say the scariest prophecy of his entire earthly ministry, of all of his teaching.

He's telling them, in essence, in chapter 13, that the final period of human history is about to begin. It's going to begin with this extended time of unprecedented tribulation in the world. What makes this teaching and this prophecy so difficult to sort through is that it's not only revealing God's plan for the end of the world as we now know it, but this is a dual prophecy.

Jesus is talking about two things at the same exact time. He's simultaneously talking about the end of the world and when he returns as well as the destruction of something that is much closer

to the hearts of the disciples and most close to the hearts of the Jewish people to whom he is speaking right here in Mark 13.

We're going to attempt to sort through what Jesus is talking about here, and we're going to stand one more time for the reading of God's Word, as we always do. We stand out of sheer respect and anticipation that this is God speaking whenever we turn to his Word. Mark, chapter 13, starting in verse 1:

"And as he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, 'Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!' And Jesus said to him, 'Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.'

And as he sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately, 'Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?' And Jesus began to say to them, 'See that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name, saying, "I am he!" and they will lead many astray. And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. This must take place, but the end is not yet.

For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. These are but the beginning of the birth pains. But be on your guard. For they will deliver you over to councils, and you will be beaten in synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them. And the gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations.

And when they bring you to trial and deliver you over, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit. And brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death. And you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.'"

O God in heaven, I pray that you will help us to understand this Word. God, help us to trust it, to know what it means for us, and to apply it. God, I pray for those who are standing all around us right now, for whom it does feel like the whole world is coming apart. I pray that today you will surprise them as well as all of us, God, with an unbelievable measure of peace and faith in your sovereignty. We ask this in Christ's name, amen.

This whole conversation in Mark, chapter 13, just two days before the crucifixion, starts out with a rather innocent observation by the disciples. They come out of the temple, they walk across the little valley there, they sit up on the hillside, the Mount of Olives, and they basically make an observation. They're looking over at the temple and they kind of nervously but proudly comment on the immense grandeur of the temple and the buildings, and rightly so.

It took 46 years to just build the main temple building and another 36 years to finish the entire temple complex. Much of the exterior of the temple was covered in pure gold, just reflecting the fiery rays of the sun in the daylight. It was a much larger, more beautiful, and even more expensive temple than Solomon built in the same exact place in the Old Testament.

Their observation, at the very best, was an understatement, if anything, as they're just glancing across the valley, saying, "Jesus, wow! Look at that!" Then, out of nowhere, Jesus drops an atom bomb on their picnic. I mean, imagine, in verse 2... The response to their admiration of the temple is a prophecy that all of it, every ounce of it, will be destroyed. Not one single stone... It'll be reduced to rubble and gravel. The whole destruction of the temple is going to be preceded and proceeded by horrific tribulation, horrific suffering, and persecution.

I can just see the disciples sitting there, looking at each other with their mouths dropped open and their eyes bugging out, just speechless. How do you respond to that? They absolutely knew in their hearts that the destruction of the temple meant the end of *them*. It meant the end of them as a people, as a Jewish nation. They knew what that entailed. So, what do you say? How do you react to Jesus?

In verse 4, the disciples kind of ask Jesus to come off to the side there. They just asked him in private, "Hey, when? When is this going to happen? Are there going to be any warnings that this is going to happen?" You could feel the tension. You could feel the nervousness of the moment. Jesus doesn't hesitate. Starting with the destruction of the temple, he basically describes the end of the world, beginning with the end of Judaism as they knew it.

As we discussed last week, in the spirit of the plain things being the main things and the main things in the passage being the plain things, I've simply titled the message, *Ready or Not*. This is going to happen. Jesus completely ignores their question as to when and he goes directly to the signs that are going to be going on and he deals with what our natural tendencies are going to be in these last days.

1. *Don't be deceived; be discerning.* Two times in verses 5 and 6, he's talking about not letting people lead you astray. He says many will be led astray. He's saying, "Keep yourself from being conned into thinking this isn't going to happen. Keep yourself from being convinced that somehow, you're going to be able to avoid this or someone's going to be able to stop it.

In verse 6, he says there's going to be no shortage of self-proclaimed messiahs and saviors, all promising they know exactly what to do, that they're going to be able to stop it, and they're going to keep us all safe. They're going to be able to make sure the end isn't going to happen. He says there are going to be people like that all over the place.

We've seen them in our lifetime, haven't we? Certainly we have. If you've lived long enough, you remember Jim Jones in the 70s, David Koresh, and people like them, all claiming to be Jesus incarnate. We've certainly seen, in the last couple of centuries, many false religions that all claim to be similar to what we believe, but they have a different Bible a different savior, and a different

gospel. It's all around us. It started in Jesus' day and it's still the same today, but even religious false saviors and messiahs... We see things a little differently.

We have our fill of economic saviors who keep promising us and claiming that if you're rich enough, you can survive anything. We have political saviors who claim, "No, no, no. It's not that. If you have the right government and the right party, we will provide for you and we will protect you. Vote for us!" We have military saviors claiming, "No, no, no. It's not that. It's the biggest bombs and the biggest army. That's who wins.

Environmental saviors are telling us and claiming that if we can control the environment, we can save the world. Then, the sociology saviors come along and say it has nothing to do with the environment. It has everything to do with the population. Control the population and we'll survive. We'll have enough food. We'll have enough air.

Then, even more recently, we have space rocket saviors. If we can just figure out how to get to another planet and set up camp there, we'll avoid all the Armageddon here, right? We have medical saviors. They laugh at all these saviors, saying, "You knuckleheads. All we need to do is stop the aging process and we'll come up with a cure for everything. The technology saviors say all we need is more cloud space. We need faster processors. We need artificial intelligence, and then we'll figure it all out.

My favorite fake saviors are my gun buddies. As much as I appreciate (and I do appreciate) the Second Amendment, and as much as I enjoy safe and responsible gun ownership...I am a gun owner; I love that...shipping containers full of ammo and guns are not going to be able to save us from what Jesus is talking about here. Are we okay with that, all my fellow gun buddies? These are all false saviors offering false or temporary hope.

There's only one Savior, and this is what he says to us in John 11. He said, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live even though they die." That's the Savior. Jesus warns us. He says, "Be discerning. Don't be gullible. There are going to be a bunch of people coming along who will say, 'Follow me, and we'll avoid all this.' No, you're not going to be able to do that."

2. *Don't panic; stay calm.* In verse 7, he says, "Don't be alarmed. Basically, the world is going to become more and more chaotic. Wars and rumors of wars are going to happen." As long as I've been alive, that has been true. It has always been the case, right? From before Jesus' day to our day, even right now. We've had world wars. We have civil wars. We have border wars. We have drug wars. We even have cold wars and Star Wars. Wars are everywhere! Wars and rumors of wars have been going on for thousands of years, but Jesus says, "Stay calm. This isn't the end."

Then, he says, "You're also going to experience incredible famines and earthquakes." We could add to that hurricanes, fires, floods, tornadoes, heat spells, cold snaps, power outages, and water shortages. We can add to that the bird flu, swine flu, and this mutant resistant flu we have. We can add to that contaminated lettuce and melting ice caps. Jesus says, "You're going to experience all of that, but stay calm. None of those necessarily means the end is happening.

Some Jesus-loving Christians watch every headline and every weather report and they try to squeeze it into Mark 13. Jesus says, "These are just the pains of a long season of Braxton Hicks contractions." The ladies know what I'm talking about, right? Those fake contractions that hurt like crazy, but the baby isn't coming. That's what Jesus is saying here. This is all going to be going on. It's going to be swirling all over the place. Don't panic.

Right now, some of you are thinking to yourself, "Steve, do you even believe in the end times? Do you believe we're in the end times right now?" To answer that, absolutely, I do! We've been in the end times for 2,000 years, and it may be another 2,000 years. Jesus is saying, "Stay calm; don't panic." Do you remember in John, chapter 14? These were his words to us. Jesus says,

"Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me... These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you... Let not your hearts be...afraid... And now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place you may believe." He is saying, "For your benefit, I'm telling you: don't panic. It's going to get nuts. The world is self-destructing under the brokenness of sin. Don't you panic. Stay calm. Don't be deceived. There's nothing anyone can do to stop it."

He's not done. He kind of turns a little corner in verse 9 and following. He's basically saying to you and me today,

3. *Be brave and bold.* It's kind of a different message when you start thinking Jesus has already said there's going to be worldwide turmoil and no shortage of fake messiahs coming along. Then, what he says next is really disconcerting. He says, in verse 9, "Be on your guard. You need to."

A. *Expect persecution from other religions.* That's most surprising. Even religions that claim to worship a god. Even persecution from religions that claim to worship the same God as we do! As we see in his example in verse 9, there, he's talking about, "There are going to be Jewish people who are going to arrest you and drag you in. They're going to harm you." This is what he's telling the disciples there.

The application is there are going to be religions in our day that are going to turn against us. They're going to take us to court. They're going to even physically try to harm us if they can. Right now, this is true in many parts of the world. In Hindu and Islamic countries, there is horrific evil and harm being done to followers of Jesus in real time today.

In our own country, it may not be that blatant, but entire Christian denominations are turning away from the Bible, from the Holy Scriptures, and they are turning against God's true people with a vengeance. There are whole supposed evangelical Christian denominations that have completely changed in the last decade. They're throwing the Bible to the side, and then they're looking at you and me like we're nuts because we still believe it's true. Jesus says, "Be brave and be bold. Expect that even religions are going to turn against you." Then he continues, saying,

B. *Expect persecution from government.* Isn't that what he says there in verse 9? "**...you will stand before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them.**" They will think they're capturing you. They will think they're stopping you. They will think they're ending and stomping Jesus out, the gospel out, and what you believe out, but Jesus is saying, "What's happening is actually I'm sovereignly sending them to you. I'm sending you to them with a missional purpose to fuel the spread of the gospel."

It's amazing. If you look at verse 10, he says, "**...the gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations.**" Before the end will come, before Jesus returns (as we're going to talk more about next week, in the coming verses), Jesus says every nation has to hear the gospel. Kings and governments represent peoples and nations.

Jesus says, "Don't worry about what you will say when you get arrested or hauled in. I already have the message I want you to speak to them. You don't need to defend yourself. You don't need to defend me. Just open your mouth. The Holy Spirit will deliver my message directly to your lips and I will give you courage to give an answer for the hope you have in me."

Isn't that what he's saying there in verses 10 and 11? The advance of the gospel to all nations will be fueled by the very persecution intended to stop it. Listen to me now. This is our great God. The world is going to think they are going to stop, stomp out, ban, and destroy Jesus and everyone who loves and follows him, and Jesus is sitting here, promising to us, 2,000 years later, saying,

"They're going to think that, but what's actually happening is I'm sending you to them. I'm going to give you what to say, you're going to proclaim the gospel to those nations, and the blood of their people will be on their hands if they snuff out the light of the gospel. Yet when I've accomplished my goal for every nation to have the gospel brought to them, I'm coming back. Until then, be brave and be bold."

He doesn't stop. In verse 12, he says,

C. *Expect persecution from family.* This is the most devastating. He's saying, in verse 12, family relationships will be broken down under the weight and the word of the gospel. It's gruesome to even read it. It's heartbreaking. He's saying, "You will be hated, rejected, threatened, disowned, and even murdered by your own kids, parents, spouse, and loved ones." That's what he's saying is going to happen.

Again, in other contexts in the world, in places like Sudan, Pakistan, and North Africa, this is happening every single day. People are coming to Christ knowing ahead of time that their family is going to hate them. It's going to be so shameful on them that they're going to be murdered by their own family, and they still put all of their hope in Jesus Christ. Wow! It's happening.

Then, Jesus says, in verse 13... I have to confess I actually smiled when I read this. It was kind of one of those weird moments. Jesus is saying all through this, "Be brave. Be bold. Expect

persecution." Then, in verse 13, he says, "Just expect to be hated by everyone." I kind of giggled. I was like, "Okay. I wish you would have started with that."

Isn't that what he says in verse 13? "**And you will be hated by all for my name's sake.**" No one in this world is going to love you or me because we follow and love Jesus Christ. We're going to win no popularity contests. We're going to have no approval ratings with the world, ever. Jesus is saying, "Allegiance to my name will make you repulsive to the world." I thought of this instantly last week. I thought, "Yeah, just ask the owners of Hobby Lobby or Chick-fil-A what it means to be repulsive to the world."

Think about it. I just read last week... I didn't gather all the details and write them down so I can spout them off to you, but basically, Chick-fil-A opened a store in New York City, and you would have thought we gave a building to ISIS and let them set up a training camp in the middle of New York City. The response from the New York Times and all the people who went nuts, basically acting like the Devil himself just showed up in town, just because the owners of Chick-fil-A love Jesus. You will be hated by everyone, so be brave and be bold. Wow!

I think there are two conclusions for us today, practically speaking. First, you just need to know that history tells us that on August 10, in AD 70, Rome burned the temple and the whole city of Jerusalem down to the ground. There wasn't one stone on top of another. It took just eight days. It happened 27 years after Jesus spoke these words in Mark 13.

The Roman historian Flavius Josephus was in the city when it happened, and he recorded it in the historical annals of Rome. He said something like this: "The national destruction against the Hebrew race by the Roman military was a wickedness beyond the mind to comprehend."

What's striking about this whole thing is that the disciples asked Jesus *when* it was going to happen, but they never asked him *why*. I find that a little peculiar. I want to answer that question: Why does God allow the Romans to bring total destruction upon the temple? I think there are a couple of reasons.

First of all, the *why* of the prophecy is because *the temple is no longer needed*. Jesus was standing in the temple one day, and the Jewish religious leaders were bragging about it in front of Jesus. Jesus just looked at them and said, "**...something greater than the temple is here**" (Matthew 12:6), speaking of himself.

You see, their pride and security were in the man-made edifice of it all. They had lost sight of the fact that the temple was only great because of who was inside of it, not because of who built it. The temple was where God himself would meet every year, once a year, with the high priest. God would mercifully accept the sacrifices of the people for the forgiveness of the people's sins.

The destruction of the temple had to happen. It had to take place in order for the people to let go of the temple, the priests, and the animal sacrifices and take hold of Jesus Christ, the perfect, sinless priest with the final sacrifice, himself. There's no longer any special place on earth to

meet God. There are no special rooms. There are no special buildings. There are no such things as sanctuaries. God's address is not on a building.

Scripture tells us, as followers of Jesus, in 1 Corinthians 3, "**Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.**" It's sad that so many people today are still trusting in externalized religion. They're still hoping and trusting in man-made religious traditions, rituals, ceremony, and acts of self-righteousness.

Today, there are all kinds of people just like the people in Jesus' day. They're looking at the externals and saying, "I'm okay. I'm going to make myself okay. I'll survive this. When I stand before God, I'll pull out my list and I'll read it to God." Nobody had a longer list of religious piety, holiness, and accomplishment than the apostle Paul, and here's what he wrote when he converted from Judaism to Christianity. He wrote, in Philippians, chapter 3, "I no longer have confidence in the flesh." In other words, "I don't trust myself or my religion."

"I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. I consider all of that other stuff rubbish, garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, but that which is found through faith in Christ." The temple had to be destroyed to let go of the externals and to take hold of Jesus Christ.

It also had to be destroyed because it was a judgment upon the very people Jesus came to save, on the spiritual blindness of those whom he came to redeem. In John 1, verse 11, it says Jesus came to his own but they received him not. They not only didn't receive him, but the Pharisees were talking about destroying Jesus, saying, "We have to destroy this man."

Jesus looked at them he said, "Tear this temple down, and I'll raise it up in three days." They thought he was talking about the temple that took 46 years to build, but he was talking about himself, the one who had the very Spirit of God in him. He says, "You destroy me; I'll be back."

I think the first practical part of this, prophetically, is that the temple had to come down. In God's sovereign plan to redeem the souls of man, it would be through Jesus, not through a building. Yet there's another conclusion I think I want us to get. It's in verse 13. It's the main idea. It's the plain thing and the main thing. Look at the last sentence of verse 13. "**But the one who endures to the end will be saved.**" Jesus wants his followers to be sure. "Stay faithful to the end and I will save you."

It's going to get crazier and crazier, but this is the hope of the gospel. Becoming a follower of Jesus doesn't just add something to the old you. It creates a completely new you and a new me. Weirdly (and I say this carefully) speaking, the gospel of Jesus Christ, once we put our faith and trust in what he has done, the death and resurrection of Jesus, kind of makes us cheerfully defiant in the face of every disappointment we have to endure in this broken-down world.

This is the supernatural power of the gospel in the life of a believer. Yes, we still suffer just like others. We shed some tears this morning during our worship, didn't we? We still grieve and we're

still sorrowful, yet by faith, we remain joyful. Somehow, some way, always rejoicing because the Scripture promises that the risen Jesus lives in us and he will never leave us. There's no other explanation for it.

This verse 13 is our eternal security promise. The greatest assurance that we know we're going to be saved is not because we got baptized, put some money in the offering, or because we went to church. That's not the security we have that we're saved. He says here, "Endure to the end." Your natural tendency when life is going to start to fall apart all around you... Some of you know what this means all too well, for many other reasons.

The natural tendency is to run away from God. Jesus says to do the opposite. Run straight to him. Stay faithful. Endure to the end. Hold on to Jesus Christ. He has promised you. He came to die for you to save you, and when he comes again, he will instantaneously change everything about this world as we now know it to be, he will gather his elect to him, and we will live forever with him. That's what the main thing is. Hold firm. Be brave. Don't panic. By all means, don't let anyone deceive you that somehow, we're all going to get out of this thing alive.

There are basically only two categories of people sitting in this room right now. In the first category are those of you who are looking forward to the return of Jesus Christ. You believe. You've put your faith and hope in him, and when he comes, your rejoicing is going to turn to dancing.

Yet in the second category of people in this room are those of you who are not sure. In fact, you might even be dreading this whole conversation. You're dreading the thought that it's going to get worse than it already is, and it will. You're dreading the return of Jesus because more than likely, you understand and know enough now that you're not ready for that return.

The good news is you can be. You don't have to get all weird, shave your head, wear weird clothes, and do weird things. Do you know what you need to do? You need to repent of your unbelief and believe the gospel that Jesus lived a sinless life and sacrificed his life as a payment for our sins, God raised him from the dead to give him power over death, and we have forgiveness and eternal life by putting our trust in the Son of God, our High Priest and ultimate sacrifice.

Would you just bow your heads, just for a minute, and close your eyes? Would you sit still and just be respectful of those around you? I want to say to those of you who just know in your hearts what Jesus is saying is right and true, but you're not ready. I want to say to you right now that you can believe.

You need to just admit, "God, I'm a sinner. I have no way of saving myself. I need Jesus Christ to be my Lord and my Savior. I surrender to him and I will follow him to the very end." If that is the desire of your heart, you can even do that today before you leave this room. Oh, I pray you will.

Father in heaven, have your way in this place. May today be the day of salvation for many. May today, God, be the day where many even right here, right now, will let go of anything external in which they're putting their hope, that they will let go of any false savior, promise, or messiah. God, I pray they will let go and cling to your Son, Jesus. Give them courage where they're fearful. In Jesus' name, amen.

The people standing up here would love to talk to any of you who are at that place of wanting to believe in Jesus. All you need to do is walk up to them and say, "Hey, I want to believe. What's the next step? That's what they're here to help you with. They'll give you something to go home with and give you exactly what you need to know to take that step of faith, to put your trust in Jesus. I hope you'll do that even before you walk out of here. Let's keep bringing our Bibles. We'll be back at it next Sunday. We'll see you then.