

November 17, 2024 Mark 13:1-8 "What Impressive Buildings!"

The time of Jesus' life was a time of unrest in Palestine. In death, Jesus took the place of Barabbas, a violent rabble-rouser, one of those with a message to upset the status quo of Israel ruled by Rome. As the Roman Empire became less a rule of law and more a cult of the personality of the emperor, the colony of Israel found it more and more intolerable. Then, a generation later, the grievances came to a head in years of uprising and rebellion against Rome, ending in the destruction of the temple came in 70 AD.

Many students of the Bible, but not all, think that Mark was writing his Gospel just before or during the tumult of 70 AD, as there is a certain intensity to this chapter, an immediacy. It seems that the Christian community Mark was a part of was suffering persecution as Christians, anticipating the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple and were displaced due to guerilla and conventional warfare.

The insurrectionists of Jesus' day and a generation later were responding to real distress, to massive social pressure and spiritual confusion, and they were a part of God working all things for good, but they were not speaking on God's behalf. Jesus leaves the temple complex for the last time after his teaching in Mark 13. The priests and Pharisees and Sanhedrin have rejected his authority and want to carry on with everything as it is.

Staying awake means seeing that things are rotten and will not continue as they are forever. It also means not believing that human personalities and schemes will bring in the kingdom of God. The final, terrible, suffering that sweeps the world order away leads not to a new world order but to a new world.

We read Christ's words and they seem to indicate that the end of the world will soon follow the destruction of the temple. This was 2000 years ago and here we are. In addition, the stones of the Western Wall are not scattered but remain as a reminder of the temple complex. Generally, people who believe in Christ's trustworthiness separate the destruction of the temple and the end of the world in the prophecy, one immediate and the other hidden behind the immediate, which looms in our horizon. Perhaps we can accept this chapter without trying to scramble to protect Christ. He is fully capable of managing his own reputation, which he does with unprecedented humility and patience.

We are to hear Christ and feel the urgency of keeping awake for the reality behind human power and wealth. God's purposes are long-ranging and good. Do we feel we can do that?

The second point is that Christ tells us of this impermanence and disruption in order that we might not be alarmed. The end of the world is coming within hours or thousands of years, but we are continue to live as all Christians are called to do, in confidence, in peace, in joy. It will be painful, but the end is Christ's kingdom fully come. Do we believe this?

Mark usually moves his story on quickly. Chapter 13 is one of the longest breaks in the action, a long teaching of Jesus, between Jesus in the temple watching the widow give her mite at the end of chapter 12 and the chief priests and scribe two days before Passover figuring out how to kill him at the beginning of chapter 14. Mark13 is called a "Little Apocalypse," with signs of the times similar to the book of Revelation.

In a Reader's Digest anecdote, a man looks through a pile of jeans at a yard sale. Waist 32, 34, 36. Oh. "Do you have any size 38?" he asks the homeowner. "Come back next year," was the answer.

Sometimes we can see where we're going and we still don't have any way to stop it from happening.

Over and over, Jesus speaks of suffering, in everyday life and in cataclysmic events leading to his return and the end of human history on earth. It's always 1) stay awake, be alert and 2) do not be anxious, do not be alarmed.

I don't remember reading these teachings, or hearing about these in church gatherings, without feeling a sense of anxiety and dread and hopelessness.

Shall we try to hear Christ this morning? The essence of his teaching in our text this morning is 1) Watch out that no one deceive you and 2) Do not be alarmed. Could we get there?

It's hard to be alert, to stay awake, to listen adequately. We don't see it coming, whether it is the betrayal of a confidence by a trusted friend, the infidelity of a spouse or the quiet creep of cynicism and bitterness in our own hearts bringing our own joy and growth to a halt.

What we see before us in buildings, cities and institutions, seems so permanent, and yet can change in an instant. The collapse of the World Trade Center. The grounding of world wide air travel during COVID. Our bank closing. Venture capitalists buying your local hospital and closing it.

The Jerusalem temple had been destroyed once before, in 168 BC, and was rebuilt bigger than ever. You may have seen in person or in photos what remains of Herod's temple, the Western Wall, nicknamed the Wailing Wall. That looming wall was not the highest or most impressive part of the temple complex that the disciples put their hands on the stones to admire.

Shall we try to hear Christ this morning? Here is the essence of his teaching in our text

1) What looks so powerful and permanent is in fact transient. Watch out that no one deceive you and take advantage of your anxiety during change. Don't follow anyone but Christ.

2) Do not be alarmed. Live as you know is right in the Lord, in calm and in turbulent times.

Go in peace.

## **Resources**

Bratcher, Robert G. and Eugene A. Nida. A Translator's Handbook on the Gospel of Mark. United Bible Societies, 1961. Pp. 396-401.

Collins, Adela Yarbro. Mark. Hermeneia Series. Fortress, 2007. Pp. 591-606.

Marcus, Joel. Mark 8-16. Anchor Yale Bible Volume 27 A. pp. 864-881.

Rhoads, David. "Social Criticism: Crossing Boundaries." In Mark and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies. Janice Capel Anderson and Stephen D. Moore, Ed. Fortress, 1992. Pp. 135-161, esp. p. 138.