

Mark 13:24–37 — Jesus And The End Of The World

September 6, 2020

Good morning. It is great to be together to study the Word of God.

Have you heard of William Miller? I understand why most of us will not recognize his name. He was born in 1782. Today he is a piece of American history. He was a farmer in rural New York state and a Baptist lay preacher. Based on his study of the Bible and his understanding of Daniel's prophetic words from Daniel 8:14, William Miller thought he was able to determine the date of Christ's return. He pinpointed it as October 22, 1844. Even though he was dead wrong, it wouldn't have been too bad if he kept his opinions to himself, but he didn't. He set out to convince people to join him in his folly. He convinced many. Wikipedia estimates there were 50,000-500,000 people who joined in his error-filled beliefs claiming October 22, 1844, would be the day of Jesus' return. They were known as the Millerites of the 1800s.

You know what happened when October 22, 1844, dawned on the calendar.

Absolutely nothing.

Not only did tens to hundreds of thousands have their expectations shattered, but thousands were left in poverty as a result of his false teachings. To support William Miller and other Millerites crossing the country with their false message, many sold all their possessions to help fund the cause. On the morning of October 23, 1844, they realized they were scammed.

William Miller's false prediction of the day Christ would return became known as the Great Disappointment of the 1800s. This afternoon, look it up on Wikipedia to learn more.

While William Miller had the wrong answer to the questions about when Jesus will return, that is still a good question. When will Jesus return? When will this world come to its dramatic end? That is what we are going to talk about this morning. We are going to get our answers from Jesus, not a rural farmer from upstate New York, so we can know we can trust them.

Last week, we returned to the Gospel of Mark. We were studying this Gospel when COVID hit. We paused our study for the spring and summer. We returned to it last week. We resumed our studies at Mark 13. This chapter is the hardest chapter in the Gospel of Mark. It is also one of the most difficult chapters in the Bible. At CrossWinds, we don't skip tough chapters. We study them and learn what God has for us in them. That is what we are doing this morning.

Let's read all of Mark 13 together even though we will focus our study on the latter verses.

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. But when you see the abomination of desolation standing where he ought not to be (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let the one who is on the housetop not go down, nor enter his house, to take anything out, and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak. And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! Pray that it may not happen in winter. For in those days there will be such tribulation as has not been from the beginning of the creation that God created until now, and never will be. And if the Lord had not cut short the days, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect, whom he chose, he shortened the days. And then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'Look, there he is!' do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform signs and wonders, to lead astray, if possible, the elect. But be on guard; I have told you all things beforehand. But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And then 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. From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. Therefore stay awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning—lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake." Mark 13:1–37 (ESV)

Does anybody find this chapter confusing? I am sure all of us are scratching our heads with at least some of these verses.

Last week, I gave you an outline of Mark 13. That outline is the key to unlocking this challenging chapter. Let me walk through the outline to reorient us.

In Mark 13:1-4, Jesus told his disciples that because Jerusalem rejected him as their rightful king, God's judgment would fall on the temple and the city. Both would be destroyed. Jesus said about the temple that not one stone would be left on another. Next, the disciples asked Jesus two questions.

1. When will Jerusalem be destroyed?
2. What will be the sign it is about to happen?

While Mark doesn't record this, if we look in the Gospel of Matthew, which records the same events of that afternoon, Matthew tells us there was a little more of the conversation between Jesus and his disciples. The disciples asked Jesus a third question that Mark does not record.

3. What will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age?

As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" Matthew 24:3 (ESV)

The rest of Mark 13 is Jesus answering the questions his disciples asked him on these two subjects. When would Jerusalem be destroyed and what will happen at the end of the world and Jesus' return?

A — v. 5-23 — The Destruction of Jerusalem

B — v. 24-27 — The End of the World

A' — v. 28-31 — The parable of the fig tree. The destruction of Jerusalem will happen in that generation

B' — v. 32-37 — The parable of the owner. Be ready. No-one knows when Jesus will return.

In verses 5-23, Jesus answered the disciples' question of what sign they should look for to know Jerusalem was about to be destroyed. The destruction of Jerusalem took place 40 years after Jesus spoke these words in 70 A.D. The

signs Jesus gave his disciples that would let them know the destruction of the city was about to transpire took place just as Jesus spoke them.

Next, Jesus gave signs that we can look for to know the end of the world is about to happen and Jesus is about to return. That is what Jesus gave us in verses 24-27. After that, Jesus gave us two parables. These parables are not talking about signs to look for but both concern questions of timing.

The first parable, known as the parable of the fig tree, answers the question of when Jerusalem would be destroyed. The second parable, known as the parable of the owner, answers the question about when Jesus will return. We can see a nice A and B pattern as Jesus first taught on the sign of Jerusalem's destruction then the sign of his return. Next, using two parables, Jesus answered the question about when Jerusalem would be destroyed and when will he return.

When we have that outline in our minds, many of the challenges of this chapter fall away.

Before we get into the second half of this chapter, let me take a few minutes to review verses 5-23. I will not go over all the details of these verses. If you want a more detailed explanation because you have questions, I refer you to last week's sermon found at the church website.

What were the signs of Jerusalem's impending destruction?

Last week, we studied verses 5-23, where Jesus answered the question, "What will be the sign of Jerusalem's impending destruction?" I realize many of you grew up being taught these verses all refer to things that will happen during the last seven years of the tribulation, a restored temple and the antichrist. I ask your graciousness. After studying these verses, I do not believe that is what

Jesus was talking about. Jesus was simply answering the disciples' question, "What will be the sign of Jerusalem's impending destruction?" Let's summarize his answer. First, he gave false signs to avoid.

There will be false signs of the end, such as earthquakes, famines, and wars.

Last week, we learned Jesus began his answer with false signs. These are things that happened before Jerusalem's destruction in 70 A.D., and they happened after 70 A.D., and they still make many people think God's judgment is about to fall. Instead of God's judgment being near, understand it is all a normal part of living in a fallen and sinful world. False signs of the end are false messiahs, human disasters such as wars, and natural disasters such as earthquakes. Most people who write end-time books love to point to earthquakes and wars as proof that God's judgment is near. They claim them as proof that Jesus could return at any moment. That may be true. That may not be true. Jesus said, "Get used to it." Wars, famines, earthquakes, plagues, and tsunamis are all a normal part of living in a world where not just our spirits but creation itself is infected with sin.

Persecution is a false sign. If they persecuted Jesus, they will persecute me.

Next, Jesus talked about what Christians would experience in life prior to the destruction of Jerusalem and prior to his return. In short, Jesus' message was, "Get used to being persecuted." If they persecuted Jesus, expect they will persecute you for following him. When we face persecution, don't let it shock us.

It may feel like the end of the world is coming, but that is not necessarily true. Christians will always be persecuted.

Do you remember how Jesus described becoming a Christian earlier in the Gospel of Mark? Jesus said it involves taking up your cross and following after him. That means when we follow Jesus, we should expect that may mean dying like Jesus. If the world hated Jesus, expect the world will hate you.

This is why it shouldn't shock us when the governor of California keeps churches closed but abortion clinics and liquor stores open. That is normal Christian persecution.

Jesus also said we should expect to be betrayed, even by those closest to us. If Jesus had Judas betray him, even though he had done nothing but good to him, expect we will have people, even from our own church and our own families, betray us, even though we have done nothing but good for them. That is a normal part of living in a fallen and sinful world. It is not necessarily a sign that God's judgment upon Jerusalem is about to happen or that Christ is about to return.

The abomination of desolation and armies surrounding Jerusalem were the true signs of Jerusalem's destruction.

If those were the false signs of Jerusalem's destruction, what were the true signs the disciples were to look for so they knew God's judgment was about to fall and Jerusalem would soon be destroyed? Jesus actually gave two signs. One he spoke in Mark, the other in Luke. The one in Mark was "when you see the abomination of desolation standing where it does not belong, you know the end of Jerusalem is near."

Last week, we learned the term abomination of desolation is a reference to prophecy in the Old Testament book of Daniel. Abomination means to take something beautiful and make it disgusting. An example of that would be a dog being hit by a car. At one time, the dog was beautiful. It was a pet in the house. It slept on the couch. Imagine it ran away and was hit by a car. You found it a week later on the side of the road in the sun. It was now a corpse filled with maggots, covered in flies, and the body smelled of death. That is taking something beautiful and making it disgusting. Desolation means to run from something because it has become repulsive.

When Daniel originally spoke about the abomination of desolation in the temple, he was prophetically speaking of something that would take temple worship and transform it from a beautiful thing to a disgusting thing. That would cause God's people to flee and leave the temple desolate.

Did that ever take place? Yes, it did. When Daniel originally spoke of the abomination of desolation in the temple, he was prophetically speaking about Antiochus Epiphanes. He was a Syrian King who in 167 B.C. conquered Jerusalem and desecrated the temple. He sacrificed pigs on the altar. He erected a statue of Zeus and himself in the holy of holies. He turned the rooms of the temple into chambers for prostitution. That was an abomination of temple worship that led to the people becoming so disgusted with worship that they ran from the temple, leaving it desolate.

When Jesus spoke of the abomination of desolation, he claimed there would be another abomination of desolation that would take place in the temple.

“When you see that happen, that is the sign you are looking for that the end is near. God’s judgment is about to fall on the temple and the city. You better run for your life.”

Historically, we know that what took place just before 70 A.D., when Jerusalem was destroyed. The Zealots, who were an ancient terrorist group worse than BLM and Antifa, took over the temple. They installed a man named Phanni as high priest. The people nicknamed him “the clown.” He had no temple training. He had a criminal background. He had people murdered inside the temple. He made temple worship an abomination. It resulted in the temple worship being desolated by the people. This happened just before Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 A.D. Jesus said, “That is the sign you are looking for. When temple worship becomes an abomination, you know God’s judgment is about to fall.”

In Luke, which is the parallel account, it tells us Jesus gave them another sign. Jesus said, “When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, you better run. God’s judgment is about to fall on the city.” That is exactly what happened. When the Roman army under Titus, the Roman general, came to Jerusalem, there was a brief period of time to escape while the army surrounded the city before the soldiers destroyed it. The Romans dug a trench around the city. They built a wall around the city and cut it off from the outside world. Once they had the city isolated, they systematically starved, crucified or killed with the sword 1.1 million of the 1.2 million people inside.

Those were the signs the disciples were to look for so they knew to run from Jerusalem because God's hand of judgment was about to fall on the city. It all happened just the way Jesus said it would take place.

This morning, Jesus continues answering the disciples' questions. He moved from the signs they needed to look for that signaled Jerusalem's imminent destruction to the signs we should look for to know Christ is about to return and the world as we know it is about to end.

What will be the sign of Jesus' coming and the end of the world?

In the Gospel of Luke, which records this same conversation, there is a little hint there is a long period of time between the destruction of Jerusalem and Jesus' return.

They will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive among all nations, and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. Luke 21:24 (ESV)

Jesus talked about the time of the Gentiles as the time where Jerusalem would be trampled on by the Gentiles. So far, that time period has lasted 2,000 years. That is a clue Jesus changed from talking about the sign of Jerusalem's destruction to the signs of the end of the world.

In addition, there are a few grammatical clues Jesus changed from talking about the destruction of Jerusalem to the end of the world. It pertains to the way Jesus used his demonstrative pronouns. Every time he used the phrase, "these things," he was referring to the destruction of Jerusalem. When Jesus started talking about "that day or that hour," it is clear he was talking about his return at the end of history and the end of the world. Let me show you what I mean.

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?” Mark 13:3–4 (ESV)

When we get to the end of this section, we see the same pronouns coming up again but notice how Jesus changed them when he changed to talking about the end of the world.

Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. “But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Mark 13:30–32 (ESV)

Let’s look at the signs Jesus gave us so we know he is about to return.

When Jesus returns, the sun and moon will go dim.

But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light... Mark 13:24 (ESV)

The first sign that Jesus is about to return is the sun will grow dark and the moon will go black. As Jesus is approaching, the very lights of the universe will grow dark. What is happening? When Jesus, who is the one that created everything in the universe, begins to arrive, the very elements that he created, such as the sun, begin to snuff out by his impending presence. This is amazing. It is an unmistakable sign. Nobody could replicate it. We see similar things described in the book of Revelation.

When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood... Revelation 6:12 (ESV)

Here we see that Jesus’ approaching arrival doesn’t just dim the sun, but it makes the entire earth shake in an earthquake. That is not a little quake or a localized quake but everything on the planet starts to shake.

When Jesus returns, the stars will fall from heaven and the planets will shake.

...and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. Mark 13:25 (ESV)

How do the stars fall from heaven to earth? I don't know. We know some stars are far bigger than our planet. Maybe it is a meteor shower as Jesus begins to arrive. I don't know. I do know it describes the powers of the heavens beginning to shake. It is not just our planet that has an earthquake as Jesus gets closer to his arrival but all planets have earthquakes. All planets begin to shake in fear as the creator of the universe and the judge of the universe is about to arrive.

An interesting thought is that this is the same Jesus who, while on earth, so completely veiled his true identity that nobody recognized him as God, apart from his miracles. He sweat. He grew tired. He could feel pain. He had to eat. That was Jesus with his divinity veiled so he could identify completely with you and me to die for us. At Jesus' second coming, his true identity will not be veiled. It will be revealed. Jesus' glory is so awesome that it dims the sun and shakes the planets, yet he veiled it for you and me to save us and to adopt us.

Revelation also talks about this happening.

...and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale. The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. Revelation 6:13–14 (ESV)

Notice how Revelation describes the stars falling to earth. They do not fall one at a time over months. It is like a tree shaker shaking cherries off a cherry

tree so they all fall in a moment. That is what will happen right before Jesus arrives.

In addition, we know Jesus is about to arrive because when we look up we will see the atmosphere above our planet splitting in half to make room for his coming. That will be an incredible moment.

Mountains and islands will be kicked out of the way like a child kicks a soccer ball to the other side of his room to make room for his coming. Are you getting an idea how awesome Jesus' arrival will be? These are clear and unmistakable signs that Jesus is about to come.

Isaiah says the same thing in the Old Testament.

Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the land a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it. For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light. Isaiah 13:9–10 (ESV)

So the signs of Jesus' imminent arrival are the sun and moon growing dim. Meteors or stars will fall from heaven all at once. The atmosphere of the earth will peel back to make way. Mountains and islands will be kicked out of the way to make room for his coming. This is all BEFORE Jesus arrives. These are the signs we need to look for so we know Jesus is about to come.

When Jesus returns, it will be in the clouds with great power and glory.

And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. Mark 13:26 (ESV)

If you are taking notes, circle the words, "with great power and glory." That is the key. That is a summary of how we know Jesus is about to come, the power and the glory.

The other phrase to circle is, “the Son of Man.” In case there is a question by what Jesus means when he talks about the Son of Man, let me explain it. Jesus called himself the Son of Man fourteen times. It was his favorite self-designation. It is a reference to a passage in Daniel 7 which talks about a person who is a human being but also a divine being who is given the title deed of the universe to reign over it for all eternity. The title deed of the universe was given by God the Father to a human but divine being called the Son of Man. In other passages, we see this same Son of Man looks like a lamb that was slain.

Who is the Son of Man? Can anybody guess? It is Jesus! He is the human being who is the divine being that was given the title deed of the universe by God the Father. Jesus is the lamb that was slain. Let me show you.

I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed. Daniel 7:13–14 (ESV)

The emphasis in this passage is the one who came to humbly serve and to give his life as a ransom for many will return with awe-inspiring might and power to judge sinners.

Hearing what Jesus’ arrival will be like is scary. Hearing that Jesus is coming back to judge sinners, like you and me, instills fear. But I have good news.

If you have trusted in Jesus and asked his death on the cross to pay for your sin, he is not coming to judge you. He is coming to save you. If you have Jesus as your savior today, he will not be your judge on that great and final day.

Look what Jesus said will happen to those who have Jesus as their savior on that great and final day.

When Jesus returns, he will come to save us.

And then 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. Mark 13:27 (ESV)

When Jesus comes back he will be coming back to save you and me. Doesn't this cause your heart to flutter to think about the awesomeness of this moment? The Jesus who makes the sun and moon go dark, who is so glorious that the sky rolls back at his presence, the Jesus whose impending arrival scatters the mountains loves us so much he died to save us from our sin. When he comes back, he is not coming to judge us for all the screwed up things we have done. He died for our sin. He loves us. He is coming back to save us. Imagine what a great moment that will be when Jesus, the greatest being in the universe, comes on this final day as our hero and our champion.

Next, Jesus moves from talking about signs of Jerusalem's destruction and signs of the end of the world, to telling parables that answer the questions, "When will the destruction of Jerusalem be? and When will Jesus' return and the end of the world be?"

When will the destruction of Jerusalem take place?

From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. Mark 13:28 (ESV)

The first parable Jesus told was about a fig tree. The fig tree is one of the few deciduous trees in Israel. That means it sheds its leaves in the fall and grows new ones in the spring. Jesus said that just as when you see the tips of the branches on the fig tree grow green, you know summer is near. In a similar way,

when they saw these things happening, they would know the destruction of Jerusalem was near.

As I told you earlier, at this point, I believe Jesus switched from talking about the end of the world. He returned to talking about the destruction of Jerusalem. There are a number of clues that lead me to this conclusion.

Notice the language. Jesus returned to talking about “these things.” In this discourse, when Jesus talked about “these things,” he was talking about the destruction of Jerusalem in the near future. When Jesus was talking about “those things,” he was talking about his return and the end of the world in the far future.

So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Mark 13:29 (ESV)

So Jesus talked about “these things” in this parable, which pertains to the destruction of Jerusalem.

We still have another sticking point. Jesus also said that when you see these things, you know that “he is near.” He refers to a person, which would make this a reference to Christ’s return. If that little phrase said, “It is near,” then it would be clearly referring to an event, such as the destruction of Jerusalem.

This is one of those moments when I am thankful for all the years of education in Greek. In the phrase “he is near,” the pronoun “he” could be translated as “he” or it could be translated as “it.” The translation could go either way! It is up to the interpreter. The translators of the ESV translate this pronoun with the word “he.” Other translations, such as the NIV, translate the pronoun with the word “it.”

Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door. Mark 13:29 (NIV84)

I believe the NIV translators have this one right and the ESV translators have this one wrong. If the pronoun is translated as an “it,” everything falls in line. It is clear Jesus returned to talking about the timing of God’s judgment on Jerusalem. If you translate the pronoun with the word “he,” you are completely lost.

The next verse holds even more treasure.

Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. Mark 13:30 (ESV)

If Jesus was talking about the destruction of the temple, which all the logical clues in this passage tell us he is doing, then this verses makes complete sense.

A biblical generation is 40 years. Jesus was speaking these words around 30 A.D. The Romans destroyed Jerusalem in 70 A.D., 40 years later. That generation did not pass away until Jesus’ words were accomplished.

Unfortunately, far too many Bible scholars miss Jesus’ switch from talking about his return to talking about Jerusalem’s destruction. That leaves far too many Bible scholars launching into strange exegetical explanations of what Jesus meant when he said “this generation.” If the text is talking about the end of the world happening within that generation, Jesus was wrong. It is 2,000 years later, and he still hasn’t return. To get themselves out of this pickle, too many Bible scholars launch into convoluted exegetical gymnastics claiming that Jesus was talking about the generation alive at his return or about the Jewish generation or about all the people of this age.

The problem with those explanations is the phrase “this generation” is spoken by Jesus 13 times in the Gospels. In every single occurrence, he was speaking of the generation alive at the time he was speaking, not another convoluted explanation.

Once you understand Jesus returned to talking about the destruction of Jerusalem and telling his disciples when it would take place, all of the problems go away.

Jesus followed up the promise of Jerusalem’s destruction in that generation with a rock solid promise guaranteeing it would happen.

Jesus’ words have more permanence than the Old Testament.

Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. Mark 13:31 (ESV)

That is a guarantee signed by Jesus that Jerusalem would be destroyed in that generation. I want to point out something fun. In Matthew, Jesus used similar language. Comparing this verse with what Jesus said in Matthew yields an interesting observation.

For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Matthew 5:18 (ESV)

In Matthew, Jesus emphasized the permanence of God’s Word in the Old Testament law. God’s Old Testament law will remain until all of it is accomplished. In Mark, Jesus said his own words *will never pass away*. They will not just remain until they are accomplished. They will remain forever.

Did you catch what Jesus was saying?

Jesus' own words have greater authority and greater permanence than God's own words in the Old Testament. This is an astounding claim to have higher authority even than God's words in the Old Testament.

When will the return of Jesus take place?

But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Mark 13:32 (ESV)

Both Matthew and Mark, in their version of the Olivet Discourse, let us know another shift takes place. Jesus began using the demonstrative pronoun he consistently used to refer to the end of the world. The word "that." Jesus started referring to "that day or that hour." While Jesus speaking prophetically told us the destruction of Jerusalem would happen within one generation, concerning his return and the end of the world as we know it, nobody knows the day or the hour, not even the angels nor the Son, but only God the Father. If the Son of God doesn't know when he will return, that means all the fruit cakes and nut jobs throughout history that claim to have nailed the date of Christ's return will always be wrong. They are claiming to know more than Jesus does about his own return! They are absurd! Jesus said the same thing a second time to emphasize his point.

Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. Mark 13:33 (ESV)

We can avoid false teachers, like William Miller, who led 50,000-500,000 people astray, by reading this book. We can avoid false teachers like Harold Camping, who said Jesus was going to return on May 21, 2011, by reading this book. In the Bible, Jesus clearly tells us nobody knows the day or the hour of his return.

What I find amazing is in the 1800s there were 50,000-500,000 people who called themselves Christians but were swept into William Miller's error. They had their lives ruined, but all of that could have been avoided if they just read their Bibles.

Do you think much is different today? I don't. Far too many people who claim to love Jesus are swept into error by false teachers because they do not read God's book. Today, if you don't have a plan to keep reading your Bible, please begin one. Read three times a week or five times a week. I beg you to make a plan to get this book into the fiber of your being. It is the only way you will know the truth about God and be kept from being swept into error.

Finally, Jesus gave us the application we need from all of these words. While nobody knows when Jesus will return, we do know that Jesus will return. It will be an awesome moment that will dim the sun and split the sky. We need to live ready for his return. To emphasize that point, Jesus gave us another parable called the parable of the owner.

It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. Therefore stay awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning — lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake. Mark 13:34–37 (ESV)

Mark says it is like a man going on a journey. He leaves his servants in charge. He tells his servants to stay awake and not goof off because he will return. They just don't know when he will return. He says, "Don't let me catch you unprepared."

We know this application goes beyond this parable, because at the end, Jesus said, “I say to you all, stay awake.”

The application for us is simple. *Live each day like Jesus could return today.* When it comes to the end of the world, give up date setting. You will always be wrong. Simply live each day like Jesus is returning today, and when he comes, you will have no regrets. What does that look like?

If Jesus came back today, would you want him to catch you on that inappropriate web page?

If Jesus came back today, would you want him to find you sleeping with a woman that is not your wife?

If Jesus came back, would you regret not having made that phone call to encourage someone who is hurting?

If Jesus came back today, is there a broken relationship you will wish you took the time to restore?

My friends, don't try to put a date on the calendar predicting when Jesus will return. You are guaranteed to be wrong. Get ready by living each day as if he was returning today. That way, when he does return, you will have no regrets.

There are three applications I want you to take away from this morning.

Applications

1. **Nothing in the Olivet Discourse indicates Jesus was talking about a future rapture of believers followed by a seven-year period of tribulation.** The Olivet Discourse is specific answers to specific questions from the disciples. Jesus did not ignore the disciples' questions and give them unrelated answers about the end of the world. I am not trying to argue there is

no tribulation or rapture. That is a different question. I am just arguing that the Olivet Discourse does not teach those things. For those of you who come from that background, I ask you to take the time to reconsider the text. That is what I did. Maybe you will come to the same conclusions I found.

2. **Be careful about speculating when Christ will return.** William Miller was able to lead almost half a million people astray in the 1800s. All people needed to do was to read the words of Jesus to realize Miller was a false prophet leading them astray. Give up on date setting. If Jesus doesn't know the day of his return, you won't figure out the day of his return.
3. **Live as if Jesus was returning today.** Jesus' point was that while we do not know when he will return, we do know that Jesus will return. That is our guarantee. The way we prepare for Christ's return is by living each day without regrets so we are prepared for Christ to return at any moment.



Dr. Kurt Trucksess is ordained in the Evangelical Free Church of America. He enjoys reading, writing, and time with his family. Feel free to contact him at www.Christ2RCulture.com (www.c2rc.com)

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