

Longing for the Return of Christ
Mark 13:24-27; 32-37

I know many of you are pumped that football season is here. I enjoy football but I don't talk about it a ton because my teams are horrible! When UK is your college team, there's not much to talk about, except for how long before basketball begins. Bourbon sales go up in Kentucky during football season! As for the NFL, the three teams I cheer for are the Redskins, Saints, and the Lions. All are usually bad (though the Saints have had some good years in recent days). I got pumped last week to see the Lions march down the field in under a minute and kick a field goal to win the game over the Colts. Joshua and I were high-fiving each other, I was texting my dad, etc. But they're still the Lions. They've never made it to the Super Bowl. I'm not optimistic about this season.

Many think about the return of Jesus like I think of the likelihood of the Lions making it to the Super Bowl! It's possible. But they're not optimistic. And it won't impact their everyday lives.

But for the Bible believing Christians, Christ's return is not a possibility; it's a certainty.

- Jesus himself predicted it!
- We don't know the date of Christ's, return, but we do know it's a certainty.
- And this certain hope should impact our everyday lives.

Luther said "There are two days in my calendar: This day and That Day." That Day should impact This Day.

Mark 13

Last week we looked at some difficult verses. I said that there are two certainties in Mark 13:

(1) The temple will be destroyed [and it was in AD 70]; and (2) Jesus will return.

The difficulty is trying to discern which verses apply to which of these two events.

I gave you several options last week, and said it's okay to disagree about the minutia of the end times, and that such discussions should never divide us, and I laid out my reading of Mark 13. I'm not going to rehash it today. I'll just remind you of my three main points:

1. Trust in the Promises of Christ
2. Endure hardships through Christ
3. Long for the Coming of Christ

It is this last point that we're looking at today.

We will focus our attention on the two paragraphs, which speak of Christ's return: 24-27 & 32-37.

However the details shake out, believers agree on this: Jesus will return and we're longing for that return!

James Edwards

The longing that things *ought not to be* as they are, and *cannot be allowed* to remain as they are, is essentially an eschatological longing. The grand finale of the gospel preached by Jesus is that there is a sure hope for the future.... [Jesus] will return in glory and justice to condemn evil, end suffering, and gather his own to himself.

I'm going to make four observations that are straight forward in this text.

1. Jesus will come again in glory and power (24-26)

Some Bible scholars actually don't see verses 24-26 referring to the return of Christ. There are two alternative views:

- **The Ascension of Jesus.** Jesus has ascended to heaven and he sends out his messengers to evangelize in order to bring in the elect.
- **The Vindication of Son of Man** Some (like N.T. Wright, R.T. France) argue that this is referring to Jesus judging Jerusalem, visiting Jerusalem, and therefore it's about Jesus being vindicated.

I don't want to spend any time on these views, only to mention them.

I remain thoroughly unconvinced of them.

I think this paragraph is talking about the *Return of the Son of Man*.

24a: "those days" "after that tribulation"

Jesus makes a clear transition to talk about a different event than the destruction of the temple.

- "Tribulation" is not a technical term for "The Great Tribulation."
- That title only appears in Revel 7:14.
- **But it's written like the two events are close together.**
- **But Jesus is silent about what will happen in between the times.**
- The prophets often write like this. **They would predict immediate events and more futuristic events in the same breath, almost as if they're the same event.**
- Some Bible scholars call this "**prophetic telescoping.**" The prophet leaps from one predictive horizon to a second one. It's like looking at a **mountain range, and thinking that one mountain is right behind the other.** But, when in reality, there's a lot of space in between the two.
- Another example: **A few years ago Kimberly and I got off a train in Paris, checked in the hotel on the outskirts of the city and went to grab dinner. Our waiter told us we could walk to the Eiffel Tower, and he pointed us in the right direction. We eventually made it to the beautiful street on the Seine River. We saw the little Statue of Liberty at a distance, and the Eiffel Tower straight down river behind it. The two monuments looked back to back! But we had never been to Paris, we didn't really know. It turns out that they were a mile apart... We had already walked two miles to get to the Little Liberty, and so after making it to the Tower, we decided to taxi back!**
- **Jesus was looking down river as it were.**
- **The little apocalypse is predicted first (temple), and his return is predicted second. They appear close together, but as we know, these events are far apart.**
- Now, **even though they're far apart in time, they're still part of one great event.**
- Cranfield, "**The events of the Incarnation, Crucifixion, Resurrection, Ascension, and Parousia, are in a real sense one Event.**"

24b-25: A Cosmic Coming

The imagery in verse 24 shows that **something cataclysmic is coming.**

- These cosmic images of the moon not giving it's light, the stars falling, and the powers in the heaven shaking are woven **together from the OT** (see Isaiah 13:10, 34:4; Ezek 32:7-8; Joel 2:10, 31), **though Mark doesn't quote any of them directly.**
- There's **language behind the language.**
- If you've never read the Bible and you read phrases like this, you may be like, "What is this?"
- Well, it's Jesus using prophetic imagery, kind of like the way **MLK Jr. dropped allusions to Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, the Declaration of Independence, and Amos 5:24...**
- Here are some of the biblical allusions to Jesus' words:

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. (Is 13:10)

The earth quakes before them;
the heavens tremble.
The sun and the moon are darkened,
and the stars withdraw their shining. (Joel 2:10)

Cosmic imagery like Mark is used in various contexts to describe God's divine intervention:

- in the destruction of Babylon (Isa 13:1-19);
- in the destruction of Jerusalem (Jer 4:23-28, 15:9);
- in the destruction of Pharaoh's army (Ezek 32); and
- in the destruction of Samaria (Amos 8:9)

Whatever these cosmic acts will look like in Mark 13, Jesus is referring to a real historical event.

- **The normal affairs of life are about to be interrupted!!!**
- **All that represents stability in creation is about to be shaken!!!**
- **Everything will be affected when the Lord of Host returns in judgment and salvation!!!**

These are not warning signs preceding His coming, but are signs revealing His glorious coming.

- There are no preliminary signs of this coming.
- No warnings. Just shock and awe!

- **He came the first time lying in a manger;**
- **He will come a second time riding on the clouds!**
- **He came the first time in humility, dying in the place of sinners;**
- **He will come a second time in glory, judging unrepentant sinners!!**

26: A Personal and Visible Coming

Someone visible is coming: The Son of Man (Daniel 7:13).

- **Liberal scholars have suggested that Jesus' return is not real; it's a way of saying Jesus' principles will be worked into societies. C'mon man. No, He is coming!**

His coming will be no secret!

- People want say, "Did I hear something about Jesus having returned!" You will know!
- **This is not like his first coming! "Where's the baby?"**
- **Herod fumbling around with maps, breaking open fortune cookies, talking to his advisors, trying to find him!**
- **At his second coming, the world will see him! It will be unmistakable.**
- **The kingdoms of this world will be the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ.**

The veil that has cloaked the Son of Man in the incarnation will be lifted for all to see His glory.

- **"He's coming to inflict judgment on those who don't know God ... [and] to be marveled at by those who have believed." (2 Thess 1:8-10)**
 - There will be cries of anguish from some when he returns.
 - Others will experience a feeling of awe and joy unmatched by any previous experience in life

The **clouds** are often images of glory. (Ex 19; Mark 9)

- Keller: “At the transfiguration, God’s presence appeared as a cloud (Mark 9:7). In the Old Testament, this glory cloud only rest in or above the Holy of Holies, and it was deadly to those who touched it (cf. Exodus 19). Now Jesus is coming back to turn the whole world into a giant Holy of Holies. The shekinah presence of God will fill the earth as it once did the Garden of Eden. Everything will be purified, beautified, glorified and renewed.”

Amen! He will come again in power and glory.

2. Jesus will come again to gather His people (27)

Jesus’ return **means salvation for His people.**

He’s coming for **“the elect”** –those that have, by grace, responded to Him in repentance and faith.

All who have trusted Him – to **the ends of the earth** – will be gathered together with God’s people!

- This is hope is a result of God’s **grace** – the elect.
- This is hope is **beautiful** - Jesus in His glory; unity amidst diversity of the nations.

Revelation 7:9-10

⁹ After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, ¹⁰ and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

All of these, gathered!

You say, what about believers that have died in **crashes, or sank on the Titanic?**

- All of them will be gathered!
- **No believer will be forgotten or will miss out on this event!**
- Jesus will not lose one of His!!! (**John 6**)

The return of Christ is sometimes portrayed as **a threat to unbelievers.** (Mark 8:38)

But it’s sometimes portrayed as a **comfort to believers.**

- **Verse 27 emphasizes this comfort.** It’s a positive orientation.
- In light of the **persecution** mentioned in this previous passage (13:9-13), this passage gives **great hope!**

The return of Christ, and the gathering of his elect, is the word of comfort we need in the midst of troubled times.

3. Jesus will come again, but we don’t know when (32)

“That day” or “that hour” – a marker signifying Christ’s return (cf., Lk 10:12)

One could see the evidence of the destruction of the temple, just as one could see that the budding of a fig tree meant that summer is near.

But NOT with the return of Jesus. There are no such signs.

Yet many try to predict it!

- Harold Camping predicted that Christ would come again on May 21, 2011. Then he revised his prediction to Oct. 21, 2011. After it came and went, he said he would retire from date setting.
- I've seen more than one suggest that it will be in 2017.
- A current theory is that Jesus will return in 2017, based on the idea that 2017 is a Jubilee year that will fulfill a medieval rabbi's prophecy. We need to try and get in the new building before then!
- Others have their own version. Some have tried to use ancient Mayan calendar to date the end of the world.

All ignore Jesus' plain words.

We must plead "ignorance" as to the time of Jesus' coming. We don't know when He will return.

- This is one occasion where it's fine to be "ignorant!"
- You shouldn't feel bad after an entire exposition on Mark 13 that we still don't know when He will come again!
- The good news is that you still don't know!
- If you thought you did know then I've done a horrible job of teaching!
- Or you've done a poor job listening!

3 Times Jesus says, "No One knows." (32, 34, 35)

- **Big Company: No One Knows**
- **Good Company: Angels, and Himself!**
- Calvin, "It would be proof of excessive pride and wicked covetousness, to desire that we who creep on the earth should know more than is permitted to the angels."
- Yes, we creep on the earth and write books about when Christ will return!

Who does know? **The Father.**

- **Acts 1:6-8**
- Verse 7, "That's not your business."
- Verse 8, "This is your business: witness."

Jesus will return, and you will not have time for last-second preparations!

You better be prepared now!

4. Jesus will come again, so be faithful and watchful (33-37)

Jesus gives some practical instructions regarding the unknown time of the end.

33-36: A Parable of the Doorkeeper

"The main point is that the servants have no advance warning that the Master of the House is coming back." (Garland)

The doorkeeper must not fall asleep on the job!

- **4 times:** "Stay Awake"
- **Even the disciples could get the point!**

We must be **watchful**. He's returning **at any point**.

We must be **faithful**. It's **the Lord Jesus** who's returning.

Augustine: "He who loves the coming of the Lord is not he who affirms that it is far off, nor is it he who says it is near, but rather he who, whether it be far off or near, awaits it with sincere faith, steadfast hope, and fervent love."

Yes, we look with **sincere faith, steadfast hope, and fervent love**.

37: Notice, the discussion **began** with Jesus talking **with four disciples (13:3)**, but it **ends** addressed to everyone: **"What I say to all."**

In other words, the return of Jesus will come suddenly and this coming will have implications for both believers and unbelievers!

Concluding Applications

Let me close with the implications, then, for unbelievers and believers.

Here, the parallel account of **Matthew 25** serves us well, as Matthew adds some additional parables immediately after this one about the Doorkeeper. And **the rest of the NT** serves us well.

1. Unbeliever: Be Ready!

Matthew 25:1-13 – the Parable of the Ten Virgins

25 "Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. ² Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. ³ For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, ⁴ but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. ⁵ As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. ⁶ But at midnight there was a cry, 'Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' ⁷ Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. ⁸ And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' ⁹ But the wise answered, saying, 'Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.' ¹⁰ And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut. ¹¹ Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' ¹² But he answered, 'Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.' ¹³ Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour."

- You can see the point: Be Ready for the Bridegroom!
- This is a typical wedding ceremony.... These ten virgins appear to be bridesmaids.
- **The final part of the wedding ceremony was a torch-lighting procession back to the groom's home for the feast. Those without a torch are not part of the procession. That was the state of half of the bridesmaids. They were foolish. They were unprepared.**
- **They couldn't borrow someone else's oil (faith).**
- **Sobering words in 11-13** – He shut the door. "I do not know you."
- His judgment **will be irreversible.**
- **My friend, the bridegroom is coming. Are you ready?**
- **We get prepared for all kinds of things on our calendars.**
- **But you have an appointment with Jesus Christ. Are you ready?**
- **What needs to happen before you get ready?**
- **You have to consider the unlikelihood of you never being ready. What do you need? A better sermon? A better argument? Some tragic event? To sow your wild oats first?**
- **No, Jesus in his grace gives you a warning. Be ready.**
- **Notice, He's inviting you to a Feast!**

2. Believer:

a. Avoid common temptations re the end times: *agitation, isolation, and/or stagnation.*

- i. **Agitation:** Some are like a cat on a hot tin roof, going crazy about the end times. Don't be that person. They're running around, doing conferences warning, "Do you know it's about to happen?" These people agitate and scare people to death with their speculations.
- ii. **Stagnation:** Don't neglect basic responsibilities. Paul had to rebuke the Thessalonians for this. Don't say, "Well, Jesus is coming back, so I don't need to get a job, pay my taxes, fight injustice, or care about politics." No! That's not biblical. **Matthew 25:31-46 regarding the end** – "I was hungry and you gave me food..." You're responsibilities to love neighbor matters! **Don't be indifferent about the concerns of the world!**
- iii. **Isolation:** **Don't neglect mission!** Some want to avoid getting involved in mission, get a house in the middle of know where, hunker down and pray for the rapture. No! **Acts 1:8! We've got a mission! Matthew 25:14-30, a parable about talents. Use them!**

b. Allow His return to inspire holiness, mission, and hope.

The return of Christ should have a transforming effect on all of life.

i. Holiness – How does the return of Christ inspire holiness?

- ***It shapes our identity (Phil 3:20).***
 - Holiness is about living out your identity. We are citizens of heaven. Live out of that identity!
- ***It is a defensive and offensive motivation for overcoming temptation to sin***
- To fight sin, you need to play both defensive and offense.
- You must not only say "no" to sin, but "yes" to something better, namely the grace of God.
- **Defensively, the return of Christ gives us healthy fear of the Lord *now*; and offensively, it encourages us with the promise of future grace later, that is, the promise that one day all things will be made new, and you won't struggle with temptation any longer.**
- So, it's both a negative and positive motivation for pursuing holiness.

Fear of the Lord (2 Pet 3:10-13):

It forces us to ask this question: "What would Jesus do if he came back right now and saw me like this?" WWJD IHCB RNASMLT!

- "I'm doing this on the internet." What would it be like if Jesus came back?
- "I just flew off the handle..." How embarrassing it would be if he returned!
- My mom caught me doing something one time I shouldn't have been doing (okay, more than once). Once, I was supposed to be at physical therapy during school hours, but I decided to go past my appointment and play hooky the rest of the day instead of going back to school. So I went home with a friend. (No one was home during the day). We were hanging out, having lunch, watching TV. Then my mom drove home. Busted. **I trembled at her return!**
- **Some of you may fear being caught by someone – spouse, mom, dad...**
- **Try this one: Jesus Christ in unveiled glory coming in the clouds!**
- **How would it affect us if we lived with this as a real possibility?**
- **What would Jesus find me doing now?**
- Now, understand, it's **not** to put us in constant fear of making one little mistake.

- But it does mean that his return **should impact our decisions and commitment to godliness.**

Future Grace (1 Pet 1:13)

- By mediating on the coming of Christ, we are purified (1 Jn 3:3)
- “Set your hope fully on the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” (1 Pet 1:13)
- **When Jesus returns, He’s bringing grace for the people of God! Hope in it! Look forward to it!**
- For the believer, struggling with sin, we know that we **only struggle for a short time.**
- One **day our sinful desires will be no more.** The fight is worth it!
- *It should keep us from the sin of bitterness (12:18-21; Matt 5:24).*
 - Vengeance is the Lord’s. He will have the last word. We can leave it to Him.
 - Bitterness will never lead you to holiness.
 - How do you deal with it? You remember that the Lord will deal with it.

ii. Mission – How does the return of Christ inspire mission?

- *It motivates us to be good stewards of God’s gifts (Matt 25:14ff).*
 - It should be an encouragement to use our gifts faithfully! (Jn 9:34)
 - **Jesus will not be impressed if all you have to show is that you are really good at Xbox.**
 - Use your gifts! Don’t waste your life.
- *It should make us bold and evangelistic (Jude 21-23).*
 - Who cares what they will do to us; Jesus is coming back.
 - Rescue the perishing! His return is coming!
- *It should make us generous. (Matt 6; 1 Tim 6:14, 19)*
 - Why hold on to stuff that you can’t keep?
 - Invest your resources in that which matters!
 - 1 Timothy 6:14, 19 – “the appearing of our Lord... store up treasure for themselves as a good foundations for the future...”

iii. Hope – When should we meditate on this great hope?

- *In the midst of suffering and temptation to sin (1 Pet 1:13, Rom 8:18; 2 Tim 4:7-8)*
 - Things are not as they ought to be but glory is coming!
 - **Newton: “My carriage is broken”**
- *When we need to encourage others (1 Thess 4:18)*
- *When we pray (1 Cor 16:22; Rev 22:20)*
 - For the early church, they prayed and longed for this:
 - **Matthew 6:10** – a daily prayer! “Thy kingdom come!”
 - **“A Christian faith that lacks the daily praying of ‘Maranatha’ and ‘Thy kingdom come’ is clearly not the faith envisioned in Mark 13 or the rest of the chapter.” (Stein)**

Christ will come.

This is not a possibility like the Lions making the Super Bowl. It’s a certainty. He is coming.

C.S. Lewis, in *The Last Battle*, describes a beautiful, imaginative picture of the eternal state: As Aslan spoke, he no longer looked to them like a lion; but as the things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them. And for us this is the end of all the

stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.

We long for the return of Christ, for the New Heavens and the New Earth.

We wait with joyful expectancy of the end – which is only the beginning.

Maranatha!