

CLOSE-UPS OF JESUS THROUGH THE LENS OF MARK - Part twenty-nine

Wednesday, January 20th, 2021 - 7:00 p.m.

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KNOWING THE TIMES IN WHICH GREAT THINGS ARE ABOUT TO HAPPEN

As we have seen, this passage deals with the whole sweep of history from the *time of the disciples leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem* to the *time of the end of the age and the great tribulation and the second coming*. It's very important to interpret these verses so they make sense of, and include *both of these time zones*.

Perhaps a simple way of stating the content of these verses is this: *the trouble the first disciples would face with the destruction of Jerusalem and intense persecution in 70 A.D. was a preview of what the end of the age would be like*. Certain verses lean more toward one end of the time scale and some to the other.

Some key thoughts from Mark 13:28-37:

- 1) Mark 13:28-29 - "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. [29] So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates."

Jesus picked the fig tree for his lesson because it was one of the few trees in that part of the world that lost all of its leaves and sprouted new buds every spring. The fig tree was to teach that, while the day and hour of future events were impossible to predict, *the general season - the era of those important events* shouldn't take attentive people totally by surprise. This parable would refer to *both the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. and the end of the age and the great tribulation*.

See also how Paul applies this idea of alertness and readiness to Christians living in the last days in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-8 - "Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. [2] For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. [3] While people are saying, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. [4] But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. [5] For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. [6] So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. [7] For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. [8] But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation."

The day may surprise some like a thief in the night, but it shouldn't be so for those who are alert and ready in Christ.

- 2) Mark 13:30-31 - "Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. [31] Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away."

There are two obvious questions to face in these verses: Which generation is "*this generation*"(30)? Is it the disciples'? Is it *just* the disciples'? Are others included? This naturally leads into the second important question: what things are meant by "*these things*"(29)? Is this the destruction of Jerusalem? Is more included?

- a) "THIS GENERATION" (30) - While the words *do* include those who, shortly after Jesus' ascension, would be alive to see the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. they also have a larger fulfillment than that.

This is made more striking in **Luke 21:29-36** - "And he told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. [30] As soon as they come out in leaf, you see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near. [31] So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. [32] Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all has taken place. [33] Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. [34] "But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap. [35] For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth. [36] But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."

The events would include more than just the destruction of Jerusalem. It would be a time of trial coming upon the "**whole earth**" (Luke 21:35). And escape would come by "**standing before the Son of Man**" (Luke 21:36). The simplest explanation is to place these events at Christ's second coming.

- b) "**THESE THINGS**" (29) - Again, it's important to remember that there's a double level of fulfillment throughout this passage. Those first disciples would be able to see the destruction of Jerusalem on the horizon. There would be signs to warn them of it's coming.

But the placement of the words "**these things**" in the text is important. It follows immediately upon the heels of describing the coming of the Son of Man (Mark 13:24-27). The point seems to be that while there are many signs that continue throughout the whole church age (wars, rumors of wars, earthquakes, etc.) the final wrap up of end time events will happen quickly - in a very **condensed** fashion. Those who see "**these things**" happen will know that the end is very close - in fact, "**right at the door**" (29).

- 3) **Mark 13:32-37** - "But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. [33] Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. [34] 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. [35] 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 cock crows, or in the morning— [36] lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. [37] And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake."

These are very telling words from Jesus. The disciples were asking **when** certain things would happen (13:3-4). Jesus' real concern was **how** they should spend their time while they waited.

Luke makes this point even more strongly - **Luke 21:34** - "But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap."

I hope you don't miss the thrust of those words. Most Christians I talk to are afraid of the Great Tribulation. Jesus was more afraid of **drunkenness** and the **cares of this life**. Apparently the great danger we all face isn't **pain or persecution or tribulation**. It's **seduction, apathy, and comfort**. Jesus said the great danger was that they would **fall asleep** (Mark 13:36) - not that they would be **tortured into submission**.

Matthew is dominated by this same theme of warning - **Matthew 24:36-39** - "But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. [37] As were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. [38] For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, [39] and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man."