

Prepared for Christ's Return

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning. My name is Matthew Capone and I'm the pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church and it's my joy to bring God's word to you today.

A special welcome if you're new or visiting with us. We're glad that you're here and we're glad that you're here. Not because we're trying to fill seats, but because we're following Jesus together as one community.

And as we follow Jesus together, we've become convinced there's no one so good. They don't need God's grace and no one so bad that they can't have it, which is why we come back week after week to see what God has for us in his word.

We're continuing our series in the Gospel of Mark. You'll remember the Gospels tell the story of Jesus in his life and his death and his resurrection. And I recognize that as we're in the middle of this study, many of you are here this morning for the event that already happened, Charlie's baptism.

And as I was discussing the date of the baptism with Andy and Jenny, Andy said, you know, I'm not really concerned about what day it is. I just want to make sure it's when you're preaching the hardest section in the Gospel of Mark.

[1 : 1 1] Because I want to make sure all my friends can watch you squirm. So there's two shows, the baptism and the pastor. I kid. But we are, in fact, coming up against the most difficult passage in the entire Gospel.

Countless words have been written about Mark 13. And so my goal this morning, as I tell you from time to time, is to say something, not everything. And so I'm just going to disappoint you right now at the very beginning.

You are not going to leave with every question answered about Mark 13. And part of the reason for that is if I answered every question, you would not leave because we'd be here into the evening.

Instead, we're going to try to keep the main thing, the main thing, and focus on the highlights for God's people in his word. You'll remember we're going through Holy Week.

We're on Tuesday of Holy Week, and this is in the evening. Jesus has finished a long day of teaching, and he's sitting on the Mount of Olives looking out at the temple. And his disciples have asked him this question at the beginning of the chapter as they're leaving the temple.

[2 : 2 0] And Jesus has spent his time condemning the religious leaders and the religious system. One of them points out to him, hey, look, isn't this temple so wonderful? Look at its wonderful stones and buildings.

And it's at that point they're called off a little off guard, and they ask in verse 4, when will these things be what will be the sign?

Because Jesus is bringing the temple and the religious system to an end. We ended last week with verse 13, which says, the one who endures to the end will be saved.

And so we ask this question, how do we endure to the end? And we looked at three challenges for God's people as they endure. False teachers, general suffering, and persecution for Christ.

As we come back to this difficult chapter, we're essentially asking the same question this week. How do we endure to the end? And it's an even more urgent question because the picture gets bleaker as we go on in this chapter.

[3 : 22] What do these instructions about the fall of the temple have to do with us? In 2023. How do we endure in suffering and persecution? How do we maintain hope in a dark world?

Now, it's important as we come against a difficult and challenging passage to not lose our way and get lost in the details. It's critical to keep due north in front of us. And so here's due north as we're heading into Mark 13.

How do we make it between Jesus' first coming and his second coming? Mark 13 is answering the question, how do Christians, those who follow Jesus, make it between Jesus' first coming and his second coming?

How is it that we keep going and endure to the end? With that, we're going to talk about two things. First, the fall of Jerusalem. And second, the end of the world.

The fall of Jerusalem and the end of the world. And with that, I'm going to invite you to turn with me to God's word. We're in Mark chapter 13. Starting at verse 14, you can turn with me in your Bible or in your worship guide or in your phone.

[4 : 33] No matter where you turn, remember that this is God's word. And God tells us that his word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path, which means that God has not left us to stumble alone in the dark, but instead he's given us his word to show us the way to go.

And so that's why we read now, starting at verse 14. 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.

Verse 17. 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.

Verse 20. 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.

[5 : 50] 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. Verse 24. Verse 24.

■ I invite you to pray as we come to this portion of God's word.

Our Father in heaven, we thank you that you are a good and loving Father. We thank you for the example of Jesus in this passage, that he tells his disciples what they need to know to endure to the end.

We ask that you would do that very same thing this morning, that you would clearly reveal to us what we need to do to endure to the end. That you'd show us our need for Jesus, and you'd show us Jesus' grace as he meets us in that need.

[7 : 50] That you'd help us by your spirit to understand and believe and live your word. We ask these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Amen. You'll remember from last week at the very beginning of the chapter, Jesus drops this bomb, so to speak, on the disciples telling them, look, this temple that you consider to be so beautiful and wonderful, it will not be long before it's completely destroyed.

And so in verse 4, they have these two questions they really want Jesus to answer. When will these things be? And what will be the sign? And you'll remember from last week, Jesus goes on a bit of a tangent.

He actually doesn't tell them when those things will be, and he doesn't tell them the sign. Instead, he tells them things that they need to know to make it during the intervening period.

So that's when we talked about false teachers, general suffering, and persecution for Christ. Now Jesus is going to return to their question and answer it directly. When will these things be? What will the sign be?

[8 : 55] Well, it's very clear, disciples. Verse 14, it's going to be when you see the abomination of desolation standing where he ought not to be. What does Jesus mean here?

These are not clear words or instructions. In fact, that's part of what let the reader understand implies. Let the reader understand. In other words, you need to think about these things.

There's a certain type of riddle to what Jesus is saying, but it's not a riddle for those who are familiar with the Old Testament because Jesus is using a phrase that is a direct quote from the book of Daniel.

It appears in the book of Daniel not once, not twice, but three different times we're told about this abomination of desolation in chapters 9, 11, and 12.

Now, if you were with us at Cheyenne Mountain back in 2021, we talked about the abomination of desolation in the book of Daniel. Here's the problem that Jesus is going to come up against as he uses this phrase, though.

[9 : 57] Daniel's prophecy has already been fulfilled. The abomination of desolation from the book of Daniel has already happened.

And this is what I read to you back in 2021. Antiochus IV of Seleucia, who styled himself Epiphanes, which is what we're told about in Daniel, invaded Jerusalem, despoiled the temple, commanded the burning of the scriptures, forbade the covenant right of circumcision, put to death many faithful Jews, and ultimately instituted pagan sacrifices in the Jerusalem temple back in 167 BC.

That's a quote from a scholar describing what happened to fulfill Daniel's prophecy. So why is Jesus referring to something that has already happened?

He's doing it because what Jesus is saying here, this is what the reader is meant to understand, that that event in 167 was the first fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy.

What Daniel told about has not been completed yet. In fact, this is the nature of prophecy, that often it has multiple fulfillments that come. And so the reader understanding is meant to say this, when you see something happening like what happened back in 167, that's when you know it's time to flee.

[11 : 24] When that event repeats again, when the temple is profaned and desecrated again, just like it was to fulfill Daniel's prophecy, that's when you know it is time to run to the hills.

And in fact, that's what he tells them in these continuing verses. Verses 14 through 20 are basically saying, flee. Don't just flee, really flee.

Verses 15 and 16, don't stop over small things. Don't go back to get a cloak. Don't go into your house to take anything out. Act as if the house is on fire.

That's how urgent it is for you to get out of town. Why is it so urgent? Well, verses 17 and 20 continue to explain how bad it's actually going to be.

And so Jesus' disciples here are meant to take these things into consideration, to remember them, to watch for this sign so they know when to flee Jerusalem.

[12 : 28] And in fact, history bears this out. Beginning in 66 AD, there were the struggles that are now known as the Jewish War when there was a revolt of the Jews against the Roman government.

And this struggle continued for a number of years, and it culminated in one point in the destruction of the temple in 70 AD. Remember, I told you the first part of this passage is going to be the destruction of the temple.

Jesus' words here are fulfilled in part in 70 AD. Now, I'm not going to go into all the weeds here. If you're a history buff, you can look up the Jewish War. Suffice to say this, in late 67 AD, early 68 AD, Jewish zealots occupied the temple.

And they did similar things to the temple that Antiochus did back in 167 BC. And so here's another scholar describing what happened.

During this period, the zealots moved into and occupied the temple area, allowed persons who had committed crimes to roam about freely in the Holy of Holies and perpetrated murder within the temple itself.

[13 : 39] These acts of sacrilege were climaxed in the winter of 67 to 68 by the investiture of the clown, Fanny, as a high priest. The temple desecrated again, 67, 68 AD.

The worst they did at the end was make a clown the high priest and set him up in the Holy of Holies. What happened that Daniel prophesied repeats again.

History bears out for us that God's people listened to Jesus' warning here. It was not until later in 68 that it became difficult to flee the temple. And the church historian Eusebius tells us that in the fourth century, Christians in fact took this as the fulfillment of an oracle and fled from Jerusalem.

They did what Jesus told them to do. They headed to the hills. And so the two phases here of Jesus' prediction is prophecy come true.

First, there's going to be the sacrilege. Then there's going to be the destruction of the temple. What happened in Roman history? First, there was the sacrilege, 67, 68 AD. Then there's destruction of the temple, 70 AD.

[14 : 54] Verses 28 through 31 basically say, know the signs, watch for the signs. That is what the first century church did. Know the signs, watch for the signs.

That's what the first century church did. That's how they escaped many of the things that happened during the final destruction of the temple. Now, some of you are history buffs and you absolutely nerded out on everything I just told you.

Some of you checked out about five minutes ago. If you checked out, here's your time to come back in. The point is this. Jesus made a prophecy.

The prophecy was fulfilled. Jesus made a prophecy. The prophecy was fulfilled. Those who listened to his words were protected. Those who listened to his words escape the destruction of the temple.

Now, if you zoned out, you also might be wondering, what in the world does 67, 68 AD and 70 AD have to do with me in 2023? Because the temple's already been destroyed.

[16 : 00] I don't need to flee from it. Well, when we come against passages like this, the application is in a sense what we did last week. It is very broad. We can look at what happened in one particular instance and see what's true about God and his character now in the present.

As we see enemies and opponents of the church circling around her in any age, we know this. God has preserved his people before.

He will preserve his people again. God has preserved his people before. He will preserve his people again. God gave them everything they needed to persevere during this great tribulation.

God protected and sustained them during persecution. God was faithful to his church in the first century.

God is faithful to his church in the 21st century. God was faithful then. He'll be faithful now. I've told you before, this is the essence of the Christian life, that we are constantly looking back and seeing God's acts and his faithfulness in the past in the history of his people and using that to give us confidence and trust and hope in his faithfulness in the present.

[17 : 30] Jesus who watched out for the early church will watch out for us. This is in fact part of the purpose of preaching and reading the Bible, that we're able to zoom out to get a larger perspective on the world than we have just by looking at what's in front of our feet, to remember the great context that we live in, that God's power is no less than it was then.

And so as we face, as we look at persecution, however it may happen in the world or in our lives, as we experience the birth pains that we talked about last week from verse eight, we know the promise of verse 31 here is true.

Heaven and earth will pass away. My words will not pass away. If and when we are tempted to despair and compromise with the world, the flesh and the devil, tempted to give up or give in, we remember that only God's word will last.

And so it's what we trust more than anything else. What's true of the early church is true of us.

The hope of the early church is our hope. God's faithfulness then is his same faithfulness now. As enemies and opponents of the church circle her in any age, God is always faithful.

[19 : 04] His word always proves true. There's one other thing I want to point out to you from this section on Jerusalem, verse 20.

It says, 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.

What the church must remember today is that God numbers the days of tribulation. God numbers the days of persecution.

God numbers the time of suffering. They persist for a time they will not persist forever. I've mentioned to you before that the Berlin Wall stood from 1961 to 1989, which is only 28 years.

Less than half a lifetime. And so we're reminded of what we talked about in the book of Daniel, that the nations are a drop in the bucket. Whatever persecution or tribulation comes your way, God has limited it.

[20 : 22] God has numbered and limited its days. Now you may have noticed, we have some repetition in this passage, verses 21 and 22.

Repeat the same thing we saw in verses 5 and 6, two weeks ago. Look, don't listen to false Christs or false prophets. Now why is it that Jesus repeats these things here?

Well, it's not simply to remind them of what he said before, but to add something on top of it. It has the same meaning as before and a new purpose. And this new purpose is in the context of fleeing from Jerusalem.

He's telling them, look, as you are fleeing the city, because of my words, which I've warned you, don't get confused and think it's the end of the world. Part of the reason students of the Bible believe that Jesus ends up talking about both Jerusalem and the end of the world, even though the disciples only asked about Jerusalem, is because in the disciples' mind, those two events are the same.

They're expecting the destruction of the temple and the end of the world to happen at the same time. And so Jesus is cluing them in here. He's saying, those things actually are not going to be at the same time.

[21 : 41] And so if someone comes up to you while you're trying to flee from Jerusalem and go to the hills, like I've told you, don't listen to them. Because if you believe that these two events are linked, are tied, you're going to be tempted to follow whatever that person is telling you.

But I am going to return. I am going to return. It's just going to be at a later time. It's not going to coincide with the fall of the temple.

And so that takes us to verses 24 through 27. The second part that I told you we're going to look at, not the fall of Jerusalem, but the end of the world.

Now, part of the way in which I'm going to disappoint you this morning is that I'm going to tell you it's hard to know in verses 24 and 25 to what extent we're dealing with symbol and metaphor, which is the nature of prophecy like this.

And so we're not going to know precisely what's meant by the powers in heaven being shaken or stars falling from heaven. What I can tell you is this, there is going to be a rearrangement of the world and its powers when Christ returns.

[22 : 52] There is going to be a fundamental shift in the way the world operates and runs. Those who are the greatest men and women in the world will no longer have that status, influence, and power because the Son of Man is going to return.

In fact, that's the quote in verses 26 and 27. It's a quote from the book of Daniel, which we already read this morning. Brett Hopper read it for us as our Old Testament reading. And in the book of Daniel, this is talking about the return of Christ.

coming to gather his people together once and for all. And so again, this answers our question.

Remember I told you we have a due north as we look at this passage. And our due north is how do we make it between Jesus' first coming and his second coming? First thing, first thing we know, how we make it, fall of Jerusalem reminds us of God's faithfulness to his people.

It reminds us that his words can be believed and trusted above everything else. This section part gives us a second answer. How do we make it between the first and the second coming?

[24 : 05] And this may sound overly simple. The way we make it is to remember there is a second coming. Jesus is actually coming back. And when he comes back, he's going to shake the powers of this world and gather all his people from the four corners of the earth.

No matter what happens, Jesus will return. That's how we make it to his second coming. Now, if you've been a Christian for some time, this might wash over you.

You might think, okay, yes, of course, I know Jesus is coming back. That's old hat. That's just what we recite when we recite the Apostles' Creed. What am I supposed to make of it in this passage?

How is this supposed to have grocery store theology for me? When I'm in King Soopers on Tuesday morning, why does it matter that the Son of Man is returning on the clouds? Well, to understand why it matters, I want you to do a thought experiment with me.

What if Jesus didn't tell us this? What if Jesus told us nothing about his coming back? We weren't sure if he was returning or not.

[25 : 20] We just knew that he had died for sins. He went up into heaven. So the rest of it's for us to figure out. There is a difference.

In fact, there's a world of difference between leaving your young child for hours and walking away without a word, leaving your young child for hours and saying, I'll be back.

Right? One of those is a separation. The other is abandonment. One is separation. The other is abandonment. During COVID, I knew a military chaplain who was working from home because of the circumstances and he had to work in his basement, his home office, because of everything shutting down.

And he told me, normally my son can't handle me leaving the house. It will come bother me and he'll come to my office. But what I've learned is, if we go through my whole going to work ritual, then he'll let me work in the basement.

So we do the same thing as if I was leaving the house and then I go to my basement and he understands. He's fine, it's a separation. If I don't do that, he can't stand not being with me while I work.

[26 : 40] That's the difference between leaving for a time and abandoning someone. It's something our children understand, we experience as well. In other words, Jesus never abandons his people.

There is always an expectation of his return. There's an explanation for Jesus' absence.

And so it is separation, not abandonment. How do we make it then between Jesus' first coming and his second coming? We know that Jesus' words are trustworthy.

We know that heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. We know that Jesus was faithful to his church in the first century. He will be faithful to his church in the 21st century.

We know that he has left this earth physically. He's at the right hand of God the Father. And we know he's coming back.

[27 : 42] That's how we're able to hold on. And so in all of this, more than anything, what matters more than the meanings of signs and symbols, the timing of Jesus' return or the destruction of the temple is that we would see Jesus.

And what we see in Jesus in this passage is his love and care for his disciples. Yes, he is leaving for a time. He has not left them without instruction.

Yes, he's leaving for a while. He has not left them without guidance. Yes, he's gone for a while. He's told them what they need to know to persevere and survive.

Same is true for us. Heaven and earth may pass away. My words will not pass away. That same love is the love that our Lord Jesus Christ gives to the people in this room and his church throughout the world.

He gives us his words that will not pass away so that no matter what comes, we are able to persevere. We're not afraid of his statement in verse 13, but you will be hated by all for my namesake, but the one who endures to the end will be saved.

[28 : 59] We know no matter what, he is coming on the clouds to gather his people from the four corners of the earth. And so we can continue and persevere and hope in faith no matter what opposition or tribulation comes.

Now you'll notice a couple times in this passage, we've heard about the elect. Verse 20, we're told, for the sake of the elect whom he chose, he shortened the days.

And then in verse 27, he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds. And the elect here is just a fancy theological word for those God has chosen, the people who belong to him, the people who have faith and trust in Jesus Christ, those who follow and believe Jesus' path along with his people.

And so most of what I've told you this morning has been encouragement, encouraging you of God's care and provision for his people. But in this passage, there's also a challenge, a question.

Are you part of the elect? Are you one of the ones who will be gathered from the four corners of the earth? Do you have faith and trust in Jesus Christ?

[30 : 20] If you don't know, that's a great question to begin asking. In fact, we have a resource in the back of your worship guide called Embracing Christianity, which talks about what it means to be one of the people that Jesus is returning for.

I encourage you to look at that, to talk to me, to talk to someone who's in the seats near you. If you are thinking, wondering, unsure of whether you are going to be gathered when the Son of Man comes on the clouds.

Because he's the one who cares intimately and carefully for his people. He's the one who gives them everything they need, both in his word and his power, to make it to the end.

I have a friend of mine who's a counselor who explained to me a couple years ago the concept of object permanence. And that might sound sort of fancy, and it's simply a way of talking about the experience of young children.

When a child is between four to eight months, that child begins to gain object permanence, which means they begin to understand that even if they can't see something, it still exists.

[31 : 29] Before that time, if something disappears, in their mind, it no longer exists. The only things that are there are the things that they can see. And so that's why it's so important to play games of peekaboo with kids.

You're teaching them about object permanence. You're saying, look, something can disappear and still exist. It can be gone and then come back. As a child develops, they begin to understand this. They know, okay, I'm separated from this toy or this person right now.

That person still exists somewhere in the world. For the Christian, this passage is reminding us to have object permanence when it comes to our Lord Jesus.

He is not physically with us right now. He is still coming back. We cannot see him because he's seated at the right hand of God the Father in the heavenly places and his words are still true.

He is not here in this room and yet his power is still as great as ever. And so we know him, we love him, we obey him, even though we can't see him.

[32 : 52] That's how we make it between Jesus' first coming and his second coming. Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we praise you and thank you for your word that teaches us and encourages us.

We ask that you would use it today to be at work in our hearts, giving us strength and courage as you remind us of your faithfulness throughout the ages and your faithfulness to us.

that you would give us joy and confidence in looking to your return, knowing that no matter what happens in this world, you have an inheritance for us that is untouchable in heaven.

Now we thank you that we don't have to worry about whether we've earned these things or whether we deserve them because we know that we don't. And instead we ask for them in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen. I invite you to stand for our closing hymn.

Amen.