

End Times

VBC

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Mark 13:1-37

Series: Mark #17

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“Setting Dates...and Missing the Point”

INTRO

Any of you that have flown know that there are occasional moments when the plane hits turbulence, the seat belt sign goes on – and passengers are ordered to take their seats and buckle up

- The times we live in feel like that – turbulent, chaotic, unstable – leaving those out of their seats unsteady

We wake every day to a bumpy ride – warnings of new threats – just this week --

- Al Quaida plans to hit US hard
- New FBI warning cites biochemical threat
- Tests confirm Sarin gas was in Baghdad bomb
- Dutch plan national personal ID by 2006
- France rejects reference to God in EU Constitution
- Moral breakdown and court actions threaten to destroy the family as we know it

So we go to movie theatres to escape – to find some peace from the craziness

*(Show clip from “Day After Tomorrow” movie trailer)

Feel better?

There’s just enough instability, unsteadiness – to lead one to wonder

- ARE WE IN THE LAST DAYS?

Not that we haven’t been thinking about it

- The Left Behind series – those novels about the Apocalypse
 - have now sold more than 62 million copies
 - so impacted our nation that the writers made the cover of Newsweek last week

Jesus had much to say

- Mark 13 – the longest block of teaching in the whole book
- Jesus gives a glimpse of what is to come
 - but it is less like the book of Revelation
 - It serves more as a manual on discipleship – a final set of orders for His followers (read)

The Context

Jesus' end was near

- And while He was focused on the Cross
 - His disciples were marveling at the buildings – vs.1
 - like some awe struck tourist – “some stones!” (13:1)
 - And they were – the temple was an awesome sight

Under Herod's rule, there was an obsession for grandeur – 50+ years were devoted to constructing it

- The temple was immense – big enough to accommodate 12 football fields
- Some of the stones were enormous – some 60 feet in length – some 600 tons
- It exceeded every other temple on earth

But as far as Jesus was concerned – it would soon amount to nothing more than a pile of rubble (13:2)

- Prompting two questions – read vss.3-4

Jesus has three basic commands

A- BE VERY CLEAR ABOUT THE TIMES – vss.5-31

- Pay attention to what is going on – “watch out” – vs.5
- History is moving towards a certain end

- Some of these words refer to events that were imminent – vss.1-13; 28-31
 - The coming catastrophe in Jerusalem – 70 AD

- Some look all the way out into the future – out to His return – vss.14-27

Like most prophetic texts – the reader moves between “these days” and “those days”

- The already and the not yet

1 - There will be deception, wars, natural disasters – vss.5-8

- Self-proclaimed prophets, deliverers will come and deceive
- War will take place on a global scale
- God will shake the earth

Yet these will only be like birth pangs – signaling the birthing of something new

2 - There will be persecution and betrayal – vss.9-13

- Adversity for the believer will not be an aberration but the norm
- Proclaiming Christ will be met with violent resistance
- Don't worry – God will be your defense

3 - There will be unparalleled distress – vss.14-20

- Here Jesus moves beyond the immediate – to a season unprecedented
- Evil will manifest itself in an ultimate way

- The ultimate expression of profanity – what most see as an allusion to the coming anti-christ --
 - who will unleash a period of tribulation so severe no one will survive if God does not cut it short

4 - There will be false Messiahs – vss.21-23

5 - There will be upheaval in the heavens – vss.24-25

- Something on a cosmic scale – a monumental collapse
- An undoing of the 4th day of creation
- The sky will split apart like a scroll

And then will be the Son of man's return – vss.26-27

- And His own will be gathered to Him

No matter how dark—Jesus will overcome!

His warning again – be very clear about the times – vss.28-31

- When birth pangs occur, when the leaves begin to come
- know that a certain end is near

Some have taken this with great seriousness – note Raptureready.com

- who give a “rapture index” – measure the “turbulence”
- Anything over 145 means “fasten your seat belt”

- This week – we're at 144 (“heavy prophetic activity”)

But this can get perilously close to date setting – leading to the second point

B- BE VERY SUSPICIOUS OF THOSE WHO SET DATES – vs.32

- While a more turbulent world indicates that an end draws near
 - no one knows – neither on earth nor in heaven – only the Father knows
 - It is hidden solely in the mystery of God
 - and history unfurls as His secret

As CS Lewis once put it —

“We...never seeing the play from outside, never meeting any characters except the tiny minority who are on in the same scenes as ourselves, wholly ignorant of the future and very imperfectly informed about the past, cannot tell at what moment the end ought to come. That it will come when it ought, we may be sure; but we WASTE OUR TIME in guessing when that will be.”

It is useless to try to crack the code

- Though there are plenty out there that try
 - Date setters and place namers have been with us since the first century
 - Second century Montanists – to 19th century Millerites – who in their calculations were sure Jesus was coming back in their lifetime

There's always been an eschatological itch – Y2K speculations – apocalyptic junkies

- End time theories that have influenced the likes of David Koresh and Timothy McVeigh
- who have failed to heed these words of Jesus

And perhaps without realizing it have done more harm than good

- Causing people to be impulsive, foolish – even depart from the faith

Illustration – In his article – “The Dark of Side of End Time Teaching”

- Coughlin tells the story of people like shock musician, Marilyn Manson
 - Who in his fuming autobiography, *The Long Hard Road Out of Hell*, blames apocalyptic theories, streams of sermons on end time themes, for why he turned from Christianity
 - As he writes – “Gradually I began to resent Christian school and doubt everything I was told”

Predictive prophecy may sell at Christian bookstores, attract a crowd to listen

- But it often turns off the unchurched
- Drive a person from the gospel
- Drive a person away from contact with reality
- Disincline a person to think long term
- Even encourage some to take perverse satisfaction in present decay

What we are called to do – is something else – Jesus' third point —

- Worry?
- Be anxious?
- Be afraid?
- Look busy?

No!!! BE VIGILANT

3 - BE VERY READY FOR HIS COMING – vss.33-37

- Vigilance – not calculation is what is required – vs.37
- He will come swiftly – like the rain in Noah's day
- I am coming at an hour you do not think – Luke 12:40
- The Lord will come as a thief in the night – I Thess 5:2; 2 Pet 3:10
- Thieves don't make appointments

So – in light of these turbulent times – BE VIGILANT

1 - TO LIVE BALANCED – to watch that I stay in the tension

- a - Planning, preparing, investing – living faithfully, fully
- Not living irresponsibly – with no thought to the future

b - Yet - with bags packed – waiting at the door for Him – awaiting His imminent return

- Don't get so caught up in this world – so entangled in it
- that you no longer are standing at the door
- Keep your head in the game
- Don't become too attached

2 - TO WATCH FOR COMPLACENCY

- Spiritual dullness
- Jesus calls us to seize the moments while we have them

Keep your souls “athletically trim” – free of excessive fat of things of this life --
(Craddock)