

May 12, 2019

Mark 13:24-37

Promises

Introduction In twenty years of teaching on both the college and seminary levels, one of the more popular classes I had the privilege of teaching was the study of Revelations. At one institution, I offered this class every spring semester for four years. Every year, students demonstrated a keen interest in seeking to understand the book as well as how it applies in the twenty-first century. The text for today's lesson indicates that the disciples of Jesus were likewise interested in knowing when the Lord would return. What did Jesus share with them?

Seen! (Mark 13:24-27). Mark 13 opens by describing a conversation Jesus had with His disciples. The conversation was prompted by a statement the disciples made related to the beauty of the temple. On that occasion, the disciples exclaimed, "What impressive buildings!" (Mark 13:1, CSB). Upon hearing this comment, Jesus remarked, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left upon another" (Mark 13:2). As you can imagine, that comment from the Lord caused quite a reaction. In fact, Mark tells us that several of the disciples went to Jesus in private to ask Him about this (Mark 13:3-4).

As a part of this broader discussion, Jesus describes His second coming. Some key events will precede His return: it will happen "after the tribulation" (Mark 13:24); signs will take place in the sky (Mark 13:24-25); then, He will return (Mark 13:26). When He returns, the Bible explains that "they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory" (Mark 13:26). Even though Mark does not specify which group "they" indicates, Matthew clarifies by noting that "all the tribes of the earth" (Matthew 24:30). So, everyone will see Jesus return! This will not be a secret event.

Be Assured (Mark 13:28-31). As Jesus continues to respond to the disciples' questions, He gives them an object lesson. He states that you can tell when summer is near when you look at the leaves of a fig tree. In other words, when you see leaves beginning to sprout, you know summer is coming (Mark 13:28). "In the same way, when you see these things happening, recognize that he is near" (Mark 13:29). Without setting any dates, Jesus explains to the disciples that there are things they can observe to help them recognize that His return is close. In fact, Jesus further noted that "this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things take place" (Mark 13:30). This verse has generated much discussion through the years. At least four solutions have been proposed, and each one has some merits! While not everyone agrees, the most natural reading of the phrase "this generation" would indicate the people who were listening to Jesus at that moment. If that is the case, then the things that Jesus could be referring to are the signs leading up to the destruction of the temple, when no stone would be left one upon the other. Even though uncertainty exists here, in the next few verses, Jesus gives one final encouragement.

Stay Ready! (Mark 13:32-37). Since no one knows the time when Jesus will return, the key is for His disciples to "Watch! Be alert!" (Mark 13:33). Jesus did not want His followers to be

caught sleeping when the master returned. If we are not careful, we can be lulled into complacency as we wait for the Lord's return. Many of us today work in fields where deadlines are important. Deadlines motivate us to complete a task or finish a project. In this case, however, no one knows when Jesus will return. We can look for the signs to give us a clue. But even then, we still do not know a date. It is for this reason that Jesus commanded His followers to watch and be alert.