



**WESTLAKE HILLS**  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Sermon Title Was **"Back to the Future"**

Sermon Series: **"The Way of Jesus"**

Mark 13

By: **Dr. Peter B. Barnes**

June 20, 2010

**Mark 13** (New International Version)

**Signs of the End of the Age**

<sup>1</sup>As he was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!"  
<sup>2</sup>"Do you see all these great buildings?" replied Jesus. "Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down."

<sup>3</sup>As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John and Andrew asked him privately, "Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?"

<sup>4</sup>Jesus said to them: "Watch out that no one deceives you. <sup>5</sup>Many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and will deceive many.  
<sup>6</sup>When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. <sup>7</sup>Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains.

<sup>8</sup>"You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them. <sup>9</sup>And the gospel must first be preached to all nations. <sup>10</sup>Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.

<sup>11</sup>"Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death.

<sup>12</sup>All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.

<sup>13</sup>"When you see 'the abomination that causes desolation'<sup>[a]</sup> standing where it<sup>[b]</sup> does not belong—let the reader understand—then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. <sup>14</sup>Let no one on the roof of his house go down or enter the house to take anything out. <sup>15</sup>Let no one in the field go back to get his cloak. <sup>16</sup>How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! <sup>17</sup>Pray that this will not take place in winter, <sup>18</sup>because those will be days of distress unequalled from the beginning, when God created the world, until now—and never to be equaled again. <sup>19</sup>If the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would survive. But for the sake of the elect, whom he has chosen, he has shortened them. <sup>20</sup>At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ<sup>[c]</sup>!' or, 'Look, there he is!' do not believe it. <sup>21</sup>For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and miracles to deceive the elect—if that were possible. <sup>22</sup>So be on your guard; I have told you everything ahead of time.

<sup>23</sup>"But in those days, following that distress,

" 'the sun will be darkened,

and the moon will not give its light;

<sup>24</sup>the stars will fall from the sky,

and the heavenly bodies will be shaken."<sup>[d]</sup>

<sup>25</sup>"At that time men will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. <sup>26</sup>And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.

<sup>27</sup>"Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near.

<sup>28</sup>Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door. <sup>29</sup>I tell you the truth, this generation<sup>[e]</sup> will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. <sup>30</sup>Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

### **The Day and Hour Unknown**

<sup>31</sup>"No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. <sup>32</sup>Be on guard! Be alert!<sup>[f]</sup> You do not know when that time will come. <sup>33</sup>It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with his assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.

<sup>34</sup>"Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. <sup>35</sup>If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. <sup>36</sup>What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!' "

#### **Footnotes:**

- [Mark 13:14](#) Daniel 9:27; 11:31; 12:11
- [Mark 13:14](#) Or he; also in verse 29
- [Mark 13:21](#) Or Messiah



- d. [Mark 13:25](#) Isaiah 13:10; 34:4
  - e. [Mark 13:30](#) Or race
  - f. [Mark 13:33](#) Some manuscripts alert and pray
- 

## **Introduction.**

Do you remember Y2K? At the turn of the century, everyone worried about the world shutting down because of the potential inability of computers to make the change when the calendar turned 2000. We're so dependent on computers nowadays to run the infrastructure of the world, people were fearful that everything would shut down and life come to a standstill. Some even predicted the end of the world.

I remember reading at that time about a cult based in Denver called Concerned Christians. The members of the group moved to Jerusalem so they could be there on January 1, 2000, for the end of the world. These cult members planned to instigate a shootout with Jerusalem police at the end of the year in an attempt to hasten the return of Christ. Fourteen members of the cult were arrested, and papers were drawn up to deport 11 of the rest of them.

Ever since the invention of the atomic bomb in the 1940s, the end of the world has become a great new modern fear, and even more recently concerns about the environment have people wondering about the possibility of the destruction of life as we know it on this planet. In the midst of all this fear, the Second Coming of Jesus has become a subject of serious discussion. Just look at the titles of the best-selling Christian books. People are making a lot of money these days preying on people's fears and the possibility of the end of the world.

But we are not alone in our generation with our concern about these matters. Millennial fever was hot 1,000 years ago at the turn of the first millennium, and people were convinced they were living in the last days then, too. And as we learn from our passage this morning, people as far back as those who lived at the time of Jesus have had a burgeoning interest in the end of the world and God's plan for the Second Coming of Christ.

As we take a look at this passage, let's look back to the future, if you will, and see what Jesus had to say about this. In particular, I want you to consider the question of the disciples, the explanation of Jesus, and the meaning for us today.

## **I. The Question of the Disciples.**

We are told in verses 1-4 of our passage that as Jesus and His disciples left the Temple and were walking away, the disciples called Jesus' attention to the magnificent buildings. They were awestruck at the beauty and size of the structures, and it is not difficult to understand why. There was nothing quite like Herod's Temple in the city of Jerusalem at the time of Christ.

The summit of Mount Zion had been dug away to leave a plateau, and at the far end of it was the Temple itself which had been re-built by Herod the Great in 19 BC. It was made of white marble and plated with gold. When the sun was shining, it was difficult to stare at the Temple because it was so bright. The Temple area was surrounded by great porches, or colonnades, and these porches were held up by pillars which were cut out of solid blocks of marble. They were 37 ½ feet high and of such a thickness that 3 men linked together could barely put their arms around them.

At the corners of the Temple, angle stones have been found which measure from 20 to 40 feet in length and which weigh more than 100 tons. How they were ever cut and placed in position is one of the mysteries of ancient engineering. It is no wonder that these Galilean fishermen looked at the buildings with awe and called Jesus' attention to them. They were like men from the country coming to the big city and standing in amazement.



The Lord told His disciples that the day would come when not one of the stones of the Temple would be left standing upon the other. Great as these buildings were, the Lord said they would be completely destroyed. Christ spoke prophetically, and He predicted the destruction of the Temple, which, in fact, occurred in 70 AD. To quell the rebellion in Jerusalem, the Roman general Titus so completely destroyed the Temple that no trace of the building can be found today, and even the exact location of the Temple is disputed. All that remains is part of the western wall of the temple area, called the Wailing Wall because Jews gather there from all over the world and pray in their grief at the loss of the Temple from their national identity.

After they left the Temple area and crossed the Kidron Valley to the Mount of Olives, four of the disciples asked Jesus privately a two-fold question – "Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?" (24:3). They figured that anything as cataclysmic, as apocalyptic as the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem would signal the end of the world, so they were curious about these events.

There is a natural curiosity in all of us about these matters, and it is easy to get caught up in the discussion about when Jesus will come again. I can remember when I was in college reading Hal Lindsay's book, *The Late Great Planet Earth*. It was on the *New York Times* best seller list for months, and everyone was reading it. It was a forerunner to the *Left Behind* series of books many people have read in recent years. Back then I even started evangelistic Bible studies about the end times, and I tried to scare people into the kingdom - Jesus is coming, are you ready?! I would point to current day events and try to demonstrate how they were the fulfillment of Biblical prophecy and that Jesus' Second Coming was just around the corner.

In our curiosity about the Second Coming of Jesus, we need to be careful we don't lose sight of what's really important in all of this. As we shall see in a moment, understanding the particulars of the timing of Christ's return is not nearly as important as remaining faithful and persevering in our walks with Jesus until He does, whenever that may be. As the world is buzzing with talk about the end of the world and we are naturally curious (perhaps even anxious) about the timing of these things, let us not lose sight of what really matters - being faithful to our Lord to the very end.

## **II. The Explanation of Jesus.**

The answer Jesus gave to the disciples' question reveals a word of caution at the very beginning - "Watch out that no one deceives you" (12:5). There is a great possibility for being deceived in any study of the end times. In my case, it was after reading books on the Second Coming, studying charts about Christ's return, and trying to scare people into the kingdom that I then read a book written from another perspective, and I came to the conclusion I had been deceived about some of these matters. The book was entitled *Is the Bible a Jigsaw Puzzle - An Evaluation of Hal Lindsay's Writings*. It was the first time I had ever read a Reformed, or Presbyterian, approach to interpreting Bible prophecy, and I was shocked to learn there were different ways of interpreting the various passages to which people point to "prove" their particular understanding of Second Coming of Jesus. I came to feel I had been sold a bill of goods.

A careful analysis of Jesus' answer to the disciples' question reveals that they actually asked two separate questions and Jesus gave two separate answers, though they are interwoven together, and it is difficult always to know which question He was addressing in His response. While the disciples thought that the destruction of the Temple would naturally lead to the immediate end of the world, they were actually two separate events. The destruction of the Temple took place in 70 AD, but the Lord has not returned for over 2,000 years. Some of what Jesus predicted in His explanation had to do with the destruction of the Temple, which has already been fulfilled, and some of His answer had to do with His return, which to date has not happened. (Well, if it did, we were all left behind!)

For example, many of Jesus' words about the rise of false prophets, the increase of wars and the rumor of wars, the multiplication of famines and earthquakes, which are sign of the birth pangs that the end is near,



the persecution and martyrdom of believers - appear to be references to the events that led up to the destruction of the Temple which Jesus predicted in verse 2. They are not necessarily a part of the prophecy concerning the return of Christ. There is a telescoping of the two events, and while they appear to hang together in Jesus' answer as though they refer to the same thing, the Lord actually predicted separate events, and we should be careful not to confuse the two. Sometimes Jesus is referring to the destruction of the Temple, and sometimes He refers to His return.

In addition, all of the language of apocalyptic literature, which is what scholars call the passages in the Bible that have to do with the end times, usually contains obscure and confusing images, such as the one in this passage - the "abomination of desolation". There is a great difference of opinion as to the precise meaning of the images. They are usually rooted in the Old Testament, but rarely are they crystal clear in what they are intended to represent.

The one thing we can know for sure from reading Mark 13 is that Jesus predicted the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, and He promised that one day He would return. The rest is a little bit fuzzy, and we would do well not to become too caught up in figuring out the precise timing of these things. I wish we had time to walk through the prophecy verse by verse and examine the passage closely, but time does not allow us to do this today. That will have to wait for another study. But one thing I want to make certain is this passage says clearly Jesus will come again. However, when he will return is not quite so clear.

### **III. The Meaning for Us Today.**

What does all of this mean for you and me? How are we to apply this passage to our own lives today? If Jesus did not speak these words on the Mount of Olives in order to give us a jigsaw puzzle whereby we can figure out all the particulars and nail down the day of His return, then what exactly is the purpose of this passage? There are several valuable lessons I think this passage teaches regarding our discipleship in Christ.

First, this passage reminds us that God has not abandoned this world. For all its evil, the world is still the setting in which God's purpose is being worked out. Our Lord does not contemplate the abandonment of the world. Rather, He prepares for its intervention. Don't be discouraged by the crescendo of evil around you. The Bible affirms that even a complete breakdown of all moral standards, when the world seems to be unraveling at the seams, is not just a prelude to destruction, it is also a prelude to re-creation.

That's an important reminder for us as we read and listen to the news of the day. When I see the unending destruction of the oil leak in the Gulf, when I grow anxious about the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the threat of Iran and North Korea, when I read of the breakdown of a moral consensus in our country and I wonder what is going to hold us together as a nation, it is a great comfort to know God is in control and He has not abandoned the world. I don't need to worry or be fearful. Whatever evil happens in the world is not the final word; it is all a prelude to re-creation and a new life in Jesus Christ.

Second, this passage reminds us that in the end, God is both just and merciful. The passage reminds of us of God's judgment, but it also reminds us of His mercy. There will be a day when everyone will be held accountable, but it will also be a day of grace and the newness of life. History is not simply circular. It is going somewhere, and there is a purpose and a destination to it all.

And finally, this passage and others that speak of the return of Jesus remind us that in the end God wins. No matter how bleak things may appear at the present time, no matter how often good is trampled by evil, no matter how many times love is crucified, the promise of Jesus' return assures us that in the end God will overcome. The game ain't over yet, and God's getting ready to come to bat. One day He will set things right, He will settle the score, and He will return in glory to claim His own and make a new heaven and a new earth, where every knee shall bow and every tongue confess and Jesus Christ is Lord!

There is a great scene in the trilogy of *the Lord of the Rings* in which Sam Gamgee discovers his friend Galdalf was not dead (as he thought) but alive. He cries, "I thought you were dead! But then I thought I was dead myself! *Is everything sad going to come untrue?*" The answer of Christianity to that question is – yes!



Everything sad is going to come untrue. In the meantime, we are called to hang in there. Perseverance is the test of the reality of faith in the Christian life, and the Bible tells us that He who endures to the end will be saved.

New Testament scholar Dale Bruner says it well: "Jesus' [Olivet Discourse] does not intend to create apocalyptic seers, it intends to create spiritual and moral long-distance runners; it does not so much give disciples supernatural knowledge of coming events as it supplies disciples with supernatural endurance and a missionary will."<sup>i</sup>

### **Conclusion.**

As we close today, let me ask you, are you looking for dates, or are you preparing for eternity? Do the troubles of the world have you all worked up and fretful about the end of time, or are you looking to the Lord and trusting in Him? In this passage Jesus says no one knows the hour of His return, not even the Son of Man. He will come as a thief in the night, when you least expect it. So why spend a lot of time and energy trying to figure out the precise day and hour of the Lord's return. Rather, spend your efforts in living for Jesus here and now. I once heard someone say, "Live for Christ as though He could return today, but plan as though He may yet tarry a thousand years." That's good advice.

Earnest Shackleton was an extraordinary explorer of the South Pole during what is called the Heroic Era of Antarctic Exploration. In 1916 he left behind a few men on Elephant Island while he went off to explore another territory, and he told them he would come back to get them and to be ready when he did. However, when he returned, there was a blockade of icebergs that would not allow the ship to get into the bay. He was worried about how he would rescue his men.

Then, as if by a miracle, one day an opening occurred in the icebergs. He raced in with the boat, picked up the men who were in fact ready, and they got out just before the icebergs crashed back together. He said to his men, "It was fortunate you were all packed and ready to go."

They replied, "We never gave up hope. Whenever the sea was clear of ice, we rolled up our sleeping bags and reminded one another, 'The boss may come today!'"<sup>ii</sup>

May we always seek to live for Christ in this world. May we make the most of every day; it may be our last. And may we maintain a readiness should the Lord return this very hour. The boss may come back today! Amen.

---

<sup>i</sup>F. Dale Bruner, *Matthew*, Vol. II, p. 841.

<sup>ii</sup> Taken from a sermon by Jim Singleton, "He Will Come Again."

