

- In the year 66 CE, the Jews, who had gotten fed up with Rome and her governance, revolted. A four-year war began between Rome and Israel. The emperor Nero appointed one of his most decorated and experienced soldiers, Vespasian, to deal with this revolt.
- Vespasian spent the first year reducing pockets of resistance throughout Galilee one by one. The loss of life was enormous. In the spring of the following year, 68 CE, Vespasian renewed his war by attacking and subduing all the area around Judea which led to the country being completely isolated. The zealots and revolutionaries began to retreat towards Jerusalem. That same year, emperor Nero committed suicide and for the next year, three emperors ruled, each one being killed until finally the dust settled and Vespasian himself became the next emperor of Rome. During this brief reprieve, instead of consolidating their forces, there was infighting and war within the different camps of the Jews.
- In the spring of 70 CE, Vespasian appointed his son Titus to wage the final campaign against Jerusalem. By the time he got to Jerusalem, he had the 5th, 12th and 15th legions along with auxiliaries, a total of around 80K men. The insurgents had, at best, 25K, led by Simon bar Giora and John Gischala.
- Jerusalem at that time was a city with different defensive systems, including 3 rings of walls. Over the next two months, the Romans breached the first wall, then the second. It was horrific fighting. The Zealots refused all offers of surrender. The situation in the city got so desperate, that Josephus, a Jewish historian, actually records a particularly gruesome account of a woman eating her own son to stay alive.
- In July, the Romans finally waged an all out attack on the last part of the city, which contained the temple.
- *“As the legions charged in, neither persuasion nor threat could check their impetuosity: passion alone was in command. Crowded together around the entrances many were trampled by their friends, many fell among the still hot and smoking ruins of the colonnades and died as miserably as the defeated. As they neared the Sanctuary they pretended not even to hear Caesar’s commands and urged the men in front to throw in more firebrands. The partisans were no longer in a position to help; everywhere was slaughter and flight. Most of the victims were peaceful citizens, weak and unarmed, butchered wherever they were caught. Round the Altar the heaps of corpses grew higher and higher, while down the Sanctuary steps poured a river of blood and the bodies of those killed at the top slithered to the bottom.”* (Josephus)
- On that day, Aug 6 sacrifices in the temple ceased and on Aug 28, the temple itself was completely burned and destroyed (the exact same day that the first temple was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar 636 years earlier).
- By the end of September, all remaining rebels had been killed or taken into captivity. Titus ordered that the city be completely destroyed, with only three towers left intact to show the power of Rome.
- You can still go to Rome and see the triumphal arch of Titus that was build to celebrate his victory over the Jews. Many believe that the riches from Jerusalem, particularly the temple, helped to fund the construction of the Coliseum which began construction that year and was used by various emperors for the next 300-400 years.
- When Jesus was in the last week of his life, this was all 35+ years away.
- We have just read of Jesus dealing with the religious leaders, overturning tables in the temple, watching a widow give her two mites, all in the temple.
- The temple that Herod the Great had rebuilt, with its 40 foot columns and foundation stones weighing more than 100 tons. Massive, beautiful and seemingly indestructible.

Mark 13:1 As Jesus was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him, “Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!” 2 “Do you see all these great buildings?” replied Jesus. “Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.”

- Jesus knew what was coming. He knew that it would all get completely destroyed.
- In fact, in the 13th chapter of Mark is the longest single discourse of Jesus that is recorded by Mark. This whole section is a dizzying and confusing assortment of comments and warnings about what was to come. It leaves me asking the question, “Why?”
- **JESUS’ WARNINGS WERE MEANT TO INSPIRE AND ENCOURAGE.**

- I’m going to read this all at once. It will be on the screen, or simply listen. Look for three things. Signs. Instructions. Promises.

Mark 13:3 As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John and Andrew asked him privately, 4 “Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?” 5 Jesus said to them: “Watch out that no one deceives you. 6 Many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am he,’ and will deceive many. 7 When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. 8 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. 9 “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. 10 And the gospel must first be preached to all nations. 11 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. 12 “Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. 13 Everyone will hate you because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. 14 “When you see ‘the abomination that causes desolation’ standing where it does not belong – let the reader understand – then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. 15 Let no one on the housetop go down or enter the house to take anything out. 16 Let no one in the field go back to get their cloak. 17 How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! 18 Pray that this will not take place in winter, 19 because those will be days of distress unequalled from the beginning, when God created the world, until now – and never to be equaled again. 20 “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. 21 At that time if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Messiah!’ or, ‘Look, there he is!’ do not believe it. 22 For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. 23 So be on your guard; I have told you everything ahead of time. 24 “But in those days, following that distress, “ ‘the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; 25 the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.’ 26 “At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. 27 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. 28 “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. 29 Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door. 30 Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. 31 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

32 “But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 33 Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. 34 It’s like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch. 35 “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. 36 If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. 37 What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!' ”

- What are we to make of all this?
- He warns his disciples about things even though almost every one of them would be dead before these things actually happened.
- **JESUS' WARNINGS WERE MEANT TO INSPIRE AND ENCOURAGE.**

I. They were meant to keep them from fear and discouragement.

- There is something that helps to know to expect something that is very helpful.
- If Jesus was only talking for the benefit of his immediate disciples, then we probably don't need to put much stock in this. If it was only for us, then why would this be important to the disciples?
- There is a “dualistic” aspect to this entire discourse.
- There is an “immediate” aspect to what Jesus is talking about (the persecution of the apostles, destruction of the temple) but there is also a “future” aspect to what Jesus is talking about (things that have not happened yet). Keep in mind throughout this entire passage that Jesus has in mind what is going to happen in the near term and what is going to happen at the end of this world.
- His words end up being relevant to those immediately hearing them AND to believers throughout the ages.
- Jesus lays out some events, some signs, to watch for.

Historically Specific Signs

- The destruction of Jerusalem was a specific sign that was fulfilled in the near future. Often, historically specific signs only become clear *after* they happen which is why it is dangerous to put too much stock in trying to predict specific events.

Governmental and Official Signs

- Jesus talks about wars, wars near and far. He speaks about nations rising up against nation.
- These seem to apply at all times, and certainly did when Jerusalem was destroyed, but at the end, there will a severe uptick in these hostilities.
- Christ followers will be handed over to government authorities. They will be punished, persecuted, tortured, forced to defend themselves and be put on trial.
- Jesus talks ‘the abomination that causes desolation’ which seemed to be allusion to what had happened 200 years earlier, what was going to happen in 70 CE and ultimately what will happen at the end, where some ruler was going to set himself up over God.

Natural Signs

- Jesus mentions earthquakes and famines. In v24-25 he even mentions sun and moon being darkened, and stars falling from the sky. We don't know all that means, but nature itself will show that things are not as they should be.

Relational Signs

- It will be bad enough that following Jesus will tear apart families to the point that some will be put to death by those closest to them.
- This is horrifying. Scary. But that was not Jesus purpose.
- He told them, “do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come.” and “I have told you everything ahead of time.”
- It does not mean you are wrong. When you see the world falling apart, know that it is part of God's plans.
- Don't seek to be persecuted, but simply don't be surprised when it happens, and if you follow Jesus fully, it will happen.

- Suffering can be more readily endured when viewed in the context of God’s plan for worldwide evangelism and vindication. **JESUS’ WARNINGS WERE MEANT TO INSPIRE AND ENCOURAGE.**

II. They were meant to remind them that God was in control.

- In the midst of all these crazy events and signs that all seem so negative, Jesus gives his followers specific promises and reminders.

A. God’s kingdom is coming

7 but the end is still to come . . . 8 These are the beginning of birth pains.

- None of this is catching God off guard. He gets it. There is a plan. The idea of birth pains is that all this “badness” is going to give birth to the new kingdom. God’s kingdom in all it’s fullness. Remember, the entire book of Mark focuses on the kingdom of God. This is a reminder that God is bringing it to fullness.

B. His presence goes with them.

11 Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.

- They are not facing this alone. The Holy Spirit, God himself, walks through this life with them.

C. Following Jesus is never in vain

13 but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.

- There is a happy ending to all that happens in this life. Justice will roll. We will be reborn. We will live in glory with him. So stay at it!

D. What’s ahead is better.

26 “At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. 27 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.

- Jesus will return. He will be in his full power. He will bring us to himself. We will get to engage in the amazing kingdom of God. It will be so beyond good. Better than your best imaginings x 100.
- **JESUS’ WARNINGS WERE MEANT TO INSPIRE AND ENCOURAGE.**

III. They were meant to shape their priorities.

- This was not simply a matter of encouraging them away from something (fear and worry) but also *towards* something,

A. Don’t get distracted from what is important.

5 Jesus said to them: “Watch out that no one deceives you.”

9 “You must be on your guard.”

21 “At that time if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Messiah!’ or, ‘Look, there he is!’ do not believe it.”

23 “So be on your guard;”

33 “Be on guard! Be alert!”

- He uses the same word each time. It means to perceive, to see or take heed.
- You notice that his warning is against being deceived.

- The temptation was going to be for them to begin to believe anything and everything from the world around them. The trials of the world threaten to pull their attention away from Jesus.
- Or they would stay within religious circles but the claims of false Messiahs would pull them away from what is true and important.
- I wonder in our culture that even though we are not looking over our shoulder, worried about someone bringing down the hammer on us, perhaps

B. Spend their energy on what mattered in God's kingdom.

- He uses a slightly different verse at the end as he encourages his disciples to keep on working.

35 *"Therefore keep watch . . . 36 If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. 37 What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!' "*

- Don't get lazy. Don't forget what this is all about. God has a plan. It is amazing and results in glory and honor. All this that is happening and going to happen fit in with God's plan, so stay focused. Use your energy doing what matters. Don't waste your time in irrelevancies.

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- Consider what happened during the disciples' lifetimes.
- Nero, the emperor who began the campaign against the Jewish rebellion, persecuted Christ-followers. They were ostracized, criticized, persecuted, excluded and even tortured and killed. The disciples themselves were all martyred but one.
- I guarantee they remembered what Jesus said. What you do to tell others about me. Putting me first. Living with kingdom priorities. It is worth it. Don't be surprised. Stuff is going to happen. But in the end, it will be so worth it."
- They found this inspiring enough to completely sell out to following Jesus.
- How does this land with you?
- We live in a land where (at least for now) there is freedom.
- While we don't face issues of imprisonment, death, torture or things like that (like they do in other parts of the world today), it can lead to loss of popularity, mocking, loss of friendships and family relationships. It could impact our business model, the amount of money we make or how we spend our time.

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- Whatever happens, we don't need to stay fearful and discouraged.
- God is in control of all of this. We have his presence now and the promise that what's ultimately ahead is so much better than anything we could imagine.
- So the challenge to us? Don't get distracted from what's important. Spend your time and your money and your energy on God's kingdom. He is coming back. For you. For me. As a the reigning king over all. That will be amazing.

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