

Series: The End

Title: The End is Near, What Now?

Text: Mark 13:24-31

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Verse 24

In Mark 13:24, Jesus transitioned to talk about His second coming. He said, “But in those days, after that tribulation: The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not shed its light.” The word “but” is significant. It is a conjunction that contrasted the topic at hand with the previous verses. Paired with the phrase “in those days,” it marked a transition to a new focus within Jesus’ teaching on the end of times.¹ Though He previously spoke of events associated with the first-century destruction of the temple, He leapt thousands of years into the future to discuss the coming of the Son of Man.²

In describing His second advent, Jesus spoke of cataclysmic natural disasters. Verse 24 referenced the sun being darkened and the moon losing its light. Such metaphors were drawn from Old Testament prophecy.³ Through the prophet Ezekiel, the Lord said, “When I snuff you out, I will cover the heavens and darken their stars. I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon will not give its light” (Ezekiel 32:7). Joel called the day of Messiah’s appearing “a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and total darkness, like the dawn spreading over the mountains” (Joel 2:2). In his visions, he saw, “The sun and moon grow dark, and the stars cease their shining” (Joel 2:10). Amos used similar language. He said, “And in that day —this is the declaration of the Lord God—I will make the sun go down at noon; I will darken the land in the daytime” (Amos 8:9).

Jesus’ usage of such Old Testament metaphors revealed that His intent was to speak of the last days. His focus was no longer on Titus’ siege of Jerusalem. He wanted His disciples to be aware of what would happen when Messiah returned to initiate His kingdom. Such would have been clear to His first-century audience, since they were well acquainted with the prophet’s declarations concerning the last days. Ryle has commented, “This part of our Lord’s prophecy on the Mount of Olives is entirely unfulfilled. The events described in it are all yet to take place. They may possibly take place in our own day. The passage therefore is one which we ought always to read with peculiar interest.”⁴

Jesus’ use of Old Testament prophetic language also demonstrates that not all Old Testament prophecies have been fulfilled. Some theological systems attempt to neutralize the Hebrew prophets, claiming there is no longer any unfulfilled prophecies in the first thirty-nine books of our Bible. It is worth noting that Jesus did not hold to this

¹ Brooks, 214.

² Schnabel, 331.

³ Robertson, 377.

⁴ Ryle, 225-226.

same perspective. Some promises in the Law and the Prophets will not fully be fulfilled until the second advent of Christ.⁵

Verse 25

Verse 25 continued Jesus' use of metaphor to describe His second coming. It said, "the stars will be falling from the sky, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken" (Mark 13:25). All in all, Jesus' apocalyptic language shouldn't be taken too literal. He used metaphorical language to describe the cataclysmic, earth-altering nature of last day events. One has noted, "The various items are not to be taken literally but as symbolic of an event of cosmic significance."⁶

Sure, changes will take place with the atmosphere, sun, moon, and stars when the end of all things draws near. One should not think of the coming changes to the earth in an isolated way. They will merely be the natural out working of the Lord's renovation of the earth, as foretold in Isaiah 65:17 — "For I will create new heavens and a new earth; the past events will not be remembered or come to mind." We know that our interpretation of Jesus' words in Mark 13:24-25 shouldn't be too literal, since Peter applied the same language to the happenings associated with the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:20).⁷ Jesus means to speak of the coming destruction of the earth that will make way for the creation of a New Heaven and a New Earth (Revelation 21:1).

Peter proclaimed the Lord's future creation of a New Heaven and New Earth: "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief; on that day the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, the elements will burn and be dissolved, and the earth and the works on it will be disclosed" (2 Peter 3:10). The Lord's work of making a New Heaven and New Earth will be a part of His plan to return humanity to pre-sin conditions. Since Adam and Eve left the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:24), the Lord has been on mission to return humanity to its original intent (Genesis 3:8 and 14-15).

Verse 26

Verse 26 succinctly described the second coming of Christ. It said, "Then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory" (Mark 13:26). The word translated "then" marked a transition from Jesus' previous words.⁸ It was intended to indicate that the Lord was moving from first-century matters to future matters. The language obviously referred to the end of all things. The return of Jesus is in view. Jesus elsewhere foretold of this event. In John 14:3, He said, "If I go away and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself, so that where I am you may be also." After our Lord's ascension, angels told the disciples: "Men of Galilee, why do you stand

⁵ Brooks, 214.

⁶ Brooks, 215.

⁷ Robertson, 377.

⁸ Brooks, 215.

looking up into heaven? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come in the same way that you have seen him going into heaven” (Acts 1:11).

The title “Son of Man” was a Messianic one. Jesus used it of Himself in Mark 2:10. In Mark 9:12, it was used in relation to prophecy. Mark 10:33 and 45 used the same words to speak of Jesus, His suffering and death. The usage of the moniker in Mark’s gospel in reference to our Lord gives a clear indicator that Jesus regarded Himself as the Divine Messiah. The apostles held to a similar estimation of Jesus. The appearance of the moniker in our current verse reveals that the subject at hand has eschatological implications. Jesus clearly meant to portray Himself as the God who will return to bring all things to an end. The scene was not a first-century one. The events related to A.D. 70 were far in the past. The second coming of Christ is in view.

The prophecy of the Olivet Discourse cannot be relegated to the first century. Jesus previously intended to foretell things related to the destruction of the temple, but He also wanted to reveal things related to the great Day of the Lord. His words in verse 26 deal with things that have still not have happened. Those who deny this reality are not honest with the text. One has remarked on the nature of the words in our verse 26, saying, “No objective interpreter can deny they intended to describe an event that as yet has not taken place and one that transcends history.”⁹

The event is quite different than Jesus’ first appearance on earth. At His incarnation, He came as a seemingly insignificant babe to Bethlehem. His appearing went unnoticed by many. At our Lord’s return, people “will see the Son of Man coming in clouds.” In Old Testament imagery, clouds were a symbol of Divine power and authority. Daniel 7:13 depicted Messiah coming to earth, surrounded by them.¹⁰

Along with clouds, Jesus depicted Himself as returning with great “glory.” The concept refers to the presence and power of God. In Mark’s gospel, our Lord previously mentioned the way in which He would return to earth with such glory (Mark 8:38). In addition, the disciples had anticipated the Lord’s appearing to be accompanied by the virtue (Mark 10:37). When Jesus appears, the full weight of the Lord’s power and presence will accompany Him.

He will come as a conquering king, and the entire world will bear witness to His authority. In Revelation, John described the event. Like Mark, he indicated that all would see Christ at the Second Coming, saying, “Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him. And all the tribes of the earth, will mourn over him. So it is to be. Amen” (Revelation 1:7). John then gave more detail concerning the Son of Man’s return later in the book of Revelation: “Then I saw heaven opened, and there was a white horse. Its rider is called Faithful and True, and with justice he judges and makes war” (Revelation 19:11). The imagery of Jesus returning in power and purity should compel us to stand in awe of Him. May we fear, adore, worship, and serve our Lord until He returns.

⁹ Brooks, 214.

¹⁰ Schnabel, 332.

Verse 27

In verse 27, Jesus continued His description of His second coming. He said, “He will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven” (Mark 13:27). At the heart of the verse is the act of Jesus gathering His people unto Himself. According to Jesus, “angels” will have a part in assembling the children of God into the Lord’s holy presence. Some see the word “angels” as referring to “messengers.” Through such a interpretation, they regard Jesus’ words as an allusion to gospel preachers bringing others into the kingdom of God through gospel proclamation. Though such an interpretation is interesting, it seems that Jesus meant to speak of literal angels providing assistance in the gathering of the saints. Mark 8:38 similarly depicts the role of angelic beings in the second coming of Christ.

Though the role of angels in end-time events is fascinating, the main focus of our current verse is the “gathering” of God’s people. The concept is a thoroughly Old Testament one. The prophets often spoke of the way in which the Lord would assemble His people together at the end of time (Deuteronomy 30:4; Psalm 147:2; and Ezekiel 11:17). Because of the Old Testament emphasis on this gathering, it is little wonder that the apostles spoke of it as well. When writing to the Thessalonians, Paul said, “Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him: We ask you, brothers and sisters, not to be easily upset or troubled, either by a prophecy, or by a message or by a letter supposedly from us, alleging that the day of the Lord, has come” (2 Thessalonians 2:1-2). Like Jesus and the prophets of old, Paul closely linked a great gathering to the appearing of Jesus.

Such a harvest of God’s people will be necessary in order to preserve them from the wrath that is to come (1 Thessalonians 5:9-11 and Revelation 19:15). For Mark’s original readers, such a promise undoubtedly brought great comfort. Many of them had been scattered to different parts of the world through the diaspora. Jesus underscored this reality by speaking of “the four winds” and “the ends of the earth.” The imagery was drawn from the prophecy of Zechariah (Zechariah 2:6).¹¹ Our Lord’s use of it undoubtedly brought comfort to Mark’s audience. Despite the way in which Roman persecution had wrecked their lives, they had promise that they would one day be reunited with loved ones and the Lord.

When He returns to earth for a second time, it will be the “elect” who will be gathered unto the Father. Such truth should bring great comfort to God’s children. Though we are often beset by trouble, though we frequently struggle with our own imperfection, though fear and worry sometimes dominate our lives, and though this broken world may sometimes press hard against us, Jesus is one day coming to take us home.

This reality should encourage and fortify us. When we feel the weight of grief, or when we struggle with the corruption of fallen society, the hope we have in Christ can enliven us. God will one day gather His children unto Himself (John 14:1-3 and

¹¹ Brooks, 215.

Revelation 19:14). At that moment, the problems and pains of this old world won't matter. Scripture says, "Then we who are still alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words" (1 Thessalonians 4:17-18). The prospect of God's great gathering of His children should bring real-world encouragement. Those who are in Christ live with an ever-present hope because of Jesus' words in Mark 13:27. Charles Spurgeon said, "The man who has a hope of the next world goes about his work strong, for the joy of the Lord is our strength...Through the Spirit of God the hope of another world is the most potent force for the product of virtue; it is a fountain of joy; it is the very channel of usefulness. It is to the Christian what food is to the vital force in the animal frame."¹²

Verse 28

In verse 28, Jesus harkened back to the fig tree incident of Mark 11:12-14 and 20-25. He said, "Learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its branch becomes tender and sprouts leaves, you know that summer is near" (Mark 13:28). Our Lord used a budding fig tree as an example concerning the last days. It would have served as a good object lesson, since most other trees in ancient Canaan were evergreens, olive trees, or oaks.¹³ In fact, it was often used in Judaea as a common method for predicting the coming of summer. Thus, the fig leaves and blooms were one of the most reliable sources for observing the transition from winter.¹⁴ The point of the metaphor was simple. Just as the appearance of spring blooms on a fig tree signaled the soon arrival of summer, signs of war, famine, and earthquakes would alert Jesus' disciples to the fulfillment of His prophecies.

In drawing His disciples attention back to His miraculous curse of the tree, Jesus likely intended to show that the warnings of verses 28-31 could be applied to people living in their lifetime. Though verses 24-27 shot thousands of years into the future to speak of Messiah's return, verses 28-31 contained applicational pronouncements for the Twelve. In a way, verse 28 begins a sort of conclusion to Jesus' entire end-times monologue. All the way through verse 37, He would wrap up His teaching by making generalized application for His hearers.

While it is important to clarify who Jesus' words were intended for in verse 28, it is equally important to understand the point of His teaching. Our Lord wanted His hearers to be able to discern the signs of the times. In light of all He had taught, disciples should have been prepared for the culmination of all things. In Matthew's gospel, Jesus rebuked the spiritually hollow religious elite for their failure to recognize His kingdom (Matthew 16:3). Disciples of all generations should be on guard that they are not guilty

¹² Spurgeon, Charles. *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit: Volume 10*. (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1976), 190.

¹³ Brooks, 216.

¹⁴ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 97.

of a similar lack of perception. Christians should study the Scriptures and make sure they have a familiarity with basic end-time truth. Sure, we want to avoid an inordinate fascination with apocalyptic speculation. However, we should also make sure that we don't become apathetic and flippant to Spirit-inspired Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16). God has given us truth concerning the end of all things for our own edification and encouragement. May we make sure we are discerning, just as Jesus encourages us to be in our current verse.

Verse 29

In verse 29, Jesus gave the meaning of the fig tree example. He said, "In the same way, when you see these things happening, recognize that he is near—at the door" (Mark 13:29). The word translated "things" refers back to all of the events spoken of in verses 6-23. Since Mark 13:4, Jesus had aimed to answer His disciples' question — "Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?" That interrogative spawned our Lord's eschatological discourse that filled chapter 13. In answer to His disciple's inquiry, Jesus told them of the signs that would mark the last days. In verse 29, He assured them that when the events of which He spoke began to take place, disciples could be confident that the end was near.

Verse 30

Jesus provided a unique promise in verse 30 in relation to His prophecies in chapter 13. He said, "Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things take place" (Mark 13:30). The word translated "truly" is one that was used in the ancient world of an authoritative pronouncement. Jesus used the term frequently in His teaching. See Mark 3:28 for another usage of it. In our current text, Jesus implemented the word to emphasize the veracity of what He was about to say. Disciples could rest assured that what He said was unequivocally true.

The verse contains a double negative in the original language of the text. Such a grammatical device was used in Koine Greek for emphasis. Mark meant to convey the Lord as strongly denying the fact that His words of prophecy would not be fulfilled. The entire world could be destroyed before the Lord's words would fail. His disciples could trust in His words.

Some, in their zeal to defend their particular brand of eschatological interpretation, have performed hermeneutical gymnastics to make Jesus' words in verse 30 mean something they were probably never intended to mean. Many of the dispensational persuasion claim that the word translated "generation" referred to the nation of Israel. They do so in an attempt to explain away why Jesus' words were not fulfilled within the lifetime of His original disciples. While this author agrees with many of the beliefs of such teachers, he sees no need to redefine the common use of the word translated "generation" in order to make the meaning of the verse fit within a certain

theological system. The term simply referred to “the sum total of those born at the same time, expanded to include all those living at a given time.”¹⁵

The aforementioned interpretation of the term “generation” goes against principles of sound Bible study. One has correctly commented “that it is not the most natural interpretation.”¹⁶ In Mark’s gospel the Greek word translated “generation” is only used of Jesus’ contemporaries (Mark 8:12; 8:38; and 9:19). As a result, it is “the most natural interpretation.”¹⁷ We should see Jesus’ reference to “this generation” as being a reference to people who were alive when He was speaking.¹⁸

If we embrace the word in our text as referring to people living during the first century, we don’t have to deny the fact that Jesus’ words had a far fulfillment in the distant future. We can still see them as having application for the end of all time. As mentioned earlier, Jesus’ prophecies in Mark 13 were intended to have both near and far fulfillments. By speaking of people in His “generation” seeing a fulfillment of His words, Jesus only meant to say that they would see the near aspects of His prophecies fulfilled. Those who heard our Lord utter the words of verse 30 were probably around seventy years of age when the events related to Titus’ siege took place. Jesus, as a true prophet, prophesied accurately that people within His generation would see the events of which He spoke fulfilled.¹⁹ Most likely, Jesus said what He said in our current verse concerning “this generation” in order to stress the importance of vigilance in the face of imminent tumult.²⁰

Verse 31

Verse 31 gave a solemn pronouncement from Jesus concerning the reliability of His teaching. Our Lord said, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away” (Mark 13:31). The combination of the words “heaven and earth” formed a Hebraic expression that was used to speak of the entirety of the created order.²¹ While “earth” referred to the globe upon which we live, “heaven” referred to the atmosphere around that globe. The Bible clearly teaches that both of these domains will one day be destroyed (2 Peter 3:11-13 and Revelation 21:1). According to Jesus, though the entire universe would one day be wiped away, His words would remain forever. His claim was in alignment with the words of the Psalmist — “Lord, your word is forever; it is firmly fixed in heaven” (Psalm 119:89).

¹⁵ Schnabel, 335.

¹⁶ Ferguson, 218.

¹⁷ Brooks, 217.

¹⁸ Schnabel, 335.

¹⁹ Schnabel, 335.

²⁰ Schnabel, 336.

²¹ Brooks, 217.

The relation between the created order and the Word of God is seen throughout Scripture. Jesus Himself is portrayed as “the Word” who existed before the world was made (John 1:1 and Proverbs 8). By the spoken word all of creation came into being (Genesis 1:3). At the end of time, human history will come to an end by the Word of God. Such is seen through the metaphor of a sword coming out of the mouth of the returning Christ in Revelation 19:15. A sword is a representation of God’s Word in Scripture (Ephesians 6:17 and Hebrews 4:12). Creation started with the Word of God, and it will end with it as well. As a result, God’s Word is more enduring than all of creation.

The truth presented in verse 31 contains a doctrine we often refer to as “the preservation of Scripture.” Simply put, this Bible teaching maintains that God’s Word will never perish, that it will be preserved by the providence of God for all generations. Jesus proclaimed this same idea in Matthew 5:18 – “Until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or one stroke of a letter will pass away from the law until all things are accomplished.” According to our Lord, His Word is more enduring than creation itself.”²² As a result, believers should trust it, cling to it, and stake their souls on it!

Though there were many opinions concerning the outworking of end-time events in the first century, Jesus’ words came from God. Our Lord spoke authoritatively concerning the subject, because He was the Son of Man (Mark 2:10). His words were fixed and true. What He said would come to pass. None needed to doubt Him. The opinions of men were fickle and fleeting before Him. For all generations, His prophecies and pronouncements stand secure. We can trust in them. His words are most important.

Jesus’ words were meant to rebuff the skepticism many have toward end-time prophecy. He showed that the issues at hand are of Divine revelation. Even in the early Church, there was great cynicism concerning the possibility of Christ’s return (2 Peter 3:3). Instead of doubting, the Church needed to trust the words of the One who was the Word (John 1:1). Still today there is a lot of eye rolling when it comes to the Bible’s claims concerning the end of all things, even amongst some professing believers. Such callousness is probably an overreaction to the unhealthy fixation on prophecy that grips many. However, we should be on guard against throwing the proverbial baby out with the bath water. Mark 13:31 teaches us that prophetic truth is a matter of Divine disclosure. Jesus has spoken and we should trust His words.

Our verse also reminds us that Jesus’ words are of greater weight than the smorgasbord of end-time gurus who fill the Christian airwaves. In a world in which debates rage concerning the details associated with the apocalypse, we should aim to “Let God be true, even though everyone is a liar” (Romans 3:4). His words are the ones we should trust. A plethora of books and teaching series will always exist on this subject. Scoffers will scoff and pundits will proclaim. Charts, calendars, and timelines will be presented. Attempts will be made at predicting exact dates, identifying the Antichrist, and associating current events with the biblical narrative. Political, global conflicts, and natural disasters will be heralded as proof that Bible prophecy is being fulfilled. In the end, what Jesus’ has said is most important.

²² Schnabel, 336.

A lesson concerning this matter is found in the Old Testament. In 2 Kings 15:12, we read of the way in which the Lord's words concerning the establishment of King Jehu's kingdom came to fulfillment. Some time before the events of that passage, the Lord had prophesied that the king's sons would carry on his lineage. Because of the monarch's faithfulness to wipeout the lineage of King Ahab, the Lord announced, "Because you have done well in carrying out what is right in my sight and have done to the house of Ahab all that was in my heart, four generations of your sons will sit on the throne of Israel" (2 Kings 10:30). Later the words of the Lord were fulfilled. The Bible says, "The word of the Lord that he spoke to Jehu was, 'Four generations of your sons will sit on the throne of Israel,' and it was so" (2 Kings 15:12). The Word of God is always fulfilled. Once it goes forth, it will not return void (Isaiah 55:11). Such is true of all of prophecy, and it is true of Jesus' words in Mark 13:31. We can trust and rely on what our Lord has said concerning the end of time. Since His words are truth (John 17:17), they are the ones we ought to listen to most of all.