

# The End of the Age: Don't Be Attached to the World

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**Text:** Mark 13<sup>1</sup>

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**Series:** The Passion of the Christ

**Introduction:** Open your Bible this morning to **Mark 13**. This morning we are asking the question: “What About the End of the World?” This is really a message about letting go of the things of this world.

**Illustration:** Bartzog and Betty Marmoody were married and had a little daughter named Martob. Bartzog's nickname was “Moody”. He was a successful doctor—they lived in Michigan.

The family traveled to Iran in August 1984 for what Moody said would be a two-week visit with his family in Tehran. Once the two weeks were over, however, he refused to allow his wife and child to leave. Betty and her daughter became trapped in a culture hostile to Americans, a family hostile to her, and an abusive husband. Betty's husband separated her from her daughter for weeks on end. He also beat her and threatened to kill her if she tried to leave.

She would not eat and struggled until finally she said she decided to go along with her environment carefully waiting for an opportunity to escape. Even though on the outside she did what she had to in order to get along, she was always longing for home, waiting for that moment when she would leave.

She eventually fled with her daughter with the help of various locals throughout Iran and Turkey through hundreds of miles of dangerous country, sometimes in car, on foot, and on horseback.

Though Betty had to live in a foreign land for a time, she was never at home.

**We are living for another home! There is coming a day when the world will end.** The Bible clearly teaches this. There have been tens of thousands of *seminars* on the last days *and what happens at the end of the world*. It seems this has happened throughout church history.

And through it all, people have tried to predict the end of the world. In my *research I found over 200 predictions of the Lord's coming*, even though the Bible clearly warns us against date setting and teaches us *that no one knows the day or the hour*.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture is from the *English Standard Version* of the Bible.

- Remember the Y2K hysteria? It wasn't new! Notable years of mass hysteria came about on major dates such as 500AD, 1000AD, 1500AD and the year 2000AD. There were many predictions of the Lord's coming in these years.

Some notable date setters include:

- **Sir Isaac Newton:** predicted Christ would come in 1715.
- **Charles Taze Russell** of Watchtower/JW fame predicted Christ would come in 1914. In fact the Watchtower Society has since predicted the coming of Christ in 1918, 1920, 1925, 1941, 1975 and 1994.
- A very popular book went around in 1988 called 88 Reasons why Christ will Return in 1988 (**Edgar C Whisenant**).
- **Harold Camping** predicted Christ would return Sept. 15, 1994. He is now predicting the Second Coming for May 21, 2011.

The sad thing about these predictions is that though the Second Coming will bring about the end of the world, the neglected fact is that in human history, most of humanity meets Christ before the Second Coming through our own death. We need to be ready at any time because none of us is guaranteed tomorrow.

In Mark 13, our Lord gives us some warnings about the end of the world. I hope we see through this message that we are far too attached to the things of this world. Eternity is just around the corner. This life is but a vapor. We must have an urgent, earnest, and compassionate outlook. We will all meet Christ within the next hundred years, either through death or the Second Coming. Are you ready?

Let's consider the message of Mark 13.

**Scripture Reading.** Let's check it out the first two verses. Here we see that...

### **Jesus Foretells Destruction of the Temple**

Mk 13:1-2, "And as he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!" 2 And Jesus said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down".

As we look to the Second coming of Christ, let's learn a lesson that Jesus is teaching his disciples. I would say it this way:

### **I. Don't be attached to buildings/programs, rather build people! (Mk. 13:1-4)**

Don't get me wrong. I'm not saying we should meet in the woods, or that we should cancel our Men's Prayer Breakfast or Ladies' Retreats! Not at all! What I am saying

is that Jesus was exposing the Jewish system that had invested in programs, tradition, and buildings instead of investing in the salvation of the people.

A. **Context:** As we look at **Mark 13**, and it is still Tuesday before the Lord's death on Friday and Jesus is leaving the Temple in Jerusalem with Peter, Andrew, James, and John. As they leave the city, one of the disciples commented to Jesus as to how beautiful and magnificent the Jewish temple was. And it was, by all accounts, a magnificent structure.

**Tacitus**, a Roman historian, said that the temple was a place of immense wealth.

It must have been a truly *awesome sight*. Now while the disciples were in awe over the magnificence of the temple, Jesus told them that it would eventually be overthrown and completely torn down. And 35 years later, in AD 70, that's exactly what happened. The Romans surrounded the city, overran it, and tore down the temple leaving it in a heap of rubble.

- The obvious point was that there was far too much attention paid to the buildings and programs and traditions, and the people were being neglected.
- **Example:** In **Mark 12:41-45**, we find the **story of the widow's two mites**. On first take it looks like a story of generosity, and the widow was certainly generous, but when you look at the context, it is a story of robbery!
  - The minimum donation accepted at the Temple treasury was 2 mites! This is really a rebuke to the system, because it wasn't building the people up, it was robbing them!
  - Jesus is pointing to the problem with the system in place! Something is wrong when the system robs the last two coins out of a widow's hand!
  - Remember, the day before Jesus had just cleaned out the Temple. The leaders were using the Temple and the system to **MAKE MONEY**.

B. **Illustration:** Let me tell you a story about the Trellis and the Vine.

**Illustration:** I have a trellis on the side of my house. In the summer time you can barely see it because it is covered with thick, beautiful, budding vines that are filled with grapes. I have to at times prune the vine and keep weeds from growing on to it.

I have another trellis at the back of my house. It's really a much more beautiful trellis than the other, but it lacks the vines that the other trellis has. As beautiful as the trellis is in my backyard, I realize it's a shame. Trellises should barely be

seen. Trellises were made to hold the vine.

I relate our church to the trellis and the vine. We were not put on this earth to build buildings to show off, but to use the buildings like a trellis. They are to be a help in building people. We are called not to build buildings but to build up people.

In **Mark 13**, we find that the disciples and really all the Jews have lost sight of this grand vision. They were all concerned about the beautiful building in the center of Jerusalem: the Temple. O what wonderful buildings the Temple grounds had. How magnificent they were!

C. **Applications:** How do we care more for things than people?

1. Are you attached more to your financial welfare than you are to your family or your church?
2. Do you care more about your furniture and the cleanliness and order of your home more than your kids?
3. Are we as a church more concerned about buildings than people? We've got to invest our lives into each other. We've got to "do life together".
4. Are you willing to take some time out of your schedule to invest in people?
5. Jesus doesn't need our money. He's not impressed with our buildings. We should of course be good stewards. But the buildings and programs and your job and your house and car and all your possessions will one day vanish away like the Temple!! What you will have left is your soul and the souls of those you love.
6. What are you doing to prepare you and your loved ones, co-workers, and friends for eternity?

**Transition:** The moment Jesus mentioned the destruction of the Temple, the disciples' minds went to the end of the world.

**Mk 13:3-4**, "And as he sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately, 4 "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished."

**Transition**

The great desire for the disciples is to know when these things are going to happen. It is important to note that the destruction of the Temple for the disciples signals the end of the world. They would have been taught that the center of the worship of God would last until the end of the world.

So we read in **Mk 13:3-4**, “And as he sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately, 4 "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished.”

That’s what we all want to know is when will all these things be? What are the signs of the end of the world?

The first sign is this: Man Centered ministries. Men will come in the Christ’s name deceiving many. Some will even claim to be the Christ. This has been true through the ages. Sadly, it’s true in recent days. As we come to the end of the age, we must be careful that we don’t get caught up in men and movements, but we keep our focus on walking with Christ.

## II. Don’t be attached to **men, ministries, and movements**, rather serve Christ! (Mk. 13:5-6)

“The pages of history are filled with the tragic stories of false messiahs, false prophets, and their enthusiastic but deluded disciples.”<sup>2</sup> The first century was filled with heresies, in fact, that we see many of them dealt with in the epistles of the New Testament. We must always be on guard. We must not ultimately be led by men, but by Christ. There is a delicate balance.

Jesus says in **Mk. 13:5-6**, “See that no one leads you astray. 6 Many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he!' and they will lead many astray.”

Jesus tells us in **Matthew 7:21-23**, that there will be many false teachers who do miracles and proclaim to know Christ as Lord, but Jesus does not know them. They are lawless, man-centered deceivers and entertainers whose focus is not **HOLINESS** but rather **HUMAN COMFORT**.

As we look toward the end, we must be so careful that we depend on the power of the Holy Spirit, and not the power of some “cult of personality. There is an addiction among the masses to the “cult of personality”.

Paul said in **2 Tim. 4:3**, “For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions.”

Paul said, “...our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive” (1 Thess. 2:3).

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<sup>2</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Mk 13:5). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.

### III. Don't be attached to **the comfort of this present world**, but be comforted by setting your heart on the world to come (Mk. 13:7-23).

**Illustration:** This week, we went puppy shopping. I've never been open to having a puppy until this week. I revealed to my children *my secret weakness* in buying a puppy. I'm sentimental for Norwegian Elkhounds. On my ninth birthday, my brother brought my sister and I a Norwegian Elkhound named Yazmin. We found a picture online of a NE, and I was hooked! Why? It reminded me of my childhood home.

We all long for home. This world is not our home. Before the end of the world, we will all be tested. This testing has gone on since the first century but will escalate before the coming of Jesus. Let's read about it.

**Mk 13:7-8**, "And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. This must take place, but the end is not yet. 8 For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. These are but the beginning of the birth pains."

Now the Lord shifts to happenings in the world, and we must be very careful here.

#### A. A Warning about **the Dangers of Prophetic Studies**

There are several dangers when thinking about end times.

- The first is *sensationalism*. Every news item becomes a sign of the end, and it becomes an addiction to the drama and a mockery of biblical prophecy. Every so often somebody predicts that infamous person is the antichrist.
- Another danger is *date setting*. Jesus said no man would not the day or the hour. That should settle it for all of us. Setting a date makes a person look supremely foolish. If someone sets a date, you can guarantee that Jesus will likely not come back that day!
- Another danger is *dogmatism*. I asked Jill's uncle if he was Pre-millennial, Post-millennial, or A-millennial. He said he was pan-millennial—he said he believes it will all “pan out” in the end. I believe we need to have a humility when it comes to the timeline of the end. We know that certain events will happen.
  - We believe there will be an awful time of tribulation near the end.
  - We believe Jesus Christ will come for His saints in mercy
  - And that He will come in judgment to destroy the unsaved world
  - We believe there will be a new heaven and a new earth
  - We believe that Christ will set up His kingdom on this earth, and

every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord.

### **The Point of Prophecy is Holiness**

Thinking about the end of the world when Jesus comes again is meant to motivate us to holiness! Considering that Jesus may come at any moment to redeem me gives me hope to get through trials, and helps me to have the fear of the Lord so that I might live a holy life in His presence. Anything that doesn't motivate me toward holiness is very likely a "side show" of sensationalism. We must be careful.

*Transition:* Having said that, let's consider the signs of the end and what we should do when we see these things taking place.

**B. Signs of the end.** Jesus' message in considering the signs of the end is this: "Do not be alarmed" (vs. 7). Many things must take place, but the end is not yet. He says there will be...

#### **1. Wars, Earthquakes, Famines: only the beginning...**

Mk 13:7-8, "And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. This must take place, but the end is not yet. 8 For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. **These are but the beginning of the birth pains.**"

Wars, rumors of wars, earthquakes, and famines will precede Jesus' return, but they are not signs of the end of the age. There will be many of these things before the end comes. The end of the world is similar to an infant who emerges from a very painful birth experience. Jesus compared wars, rumors of war, earthquakes, and famines to the **beginning of these pains**. These events, as predicted, would simply signify that the end was *near*. He called them the beginning of "birth-pangs."

Now "birth-pangs" are significant in this context. For when a woman goes into labor she has sudden contractions a few minutes apart, and as time goes by those contractions become more and more frequent and intense. Like a snowball going down a hill, her pain progresses like a snowball that gets larger as it rolls down. So it is with labor pains. They start slow and build up along the way. By the time the baby is in the birth canal the pain is at a climax. Then there's a child! So it is with the end-times. World-wide events like false messiahs, wars and rumors of wars, nations rising up against other nations, and earthquakes/famines in various places signify that the labor pains have begun in relation to the end-times events. Just as labor pains come upon a woman suddenly (though expectedly) the end-times events will come about suddenly.

*Application:* Jesus does not give the time in which these events occur. He

purposely hides when He is coming back! Our ignorance of his arrival is designed to keep us sharp and on the alert.

**Transition:** There's another sign of Christ's coming. Now the Lord doesn't say, "Don't be alarmed"; He says, "Be on your guard". There's real danger coming to us in the form of...

- 2. Persecution.** The first wave of this begins in the first century before the destruction of the Jewish Temple, when it says Christians will be "beaten in synagogues. Jesus says in verse 10, "**the gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations**" this is the same sentiment as the Great Commission. The Gospel power is always most powerful in persecution. By the way, the Gospel is going forth!
- Approximately 72 million Bibles are distributed globally per year
  - There are about 5.5 million full time Christian workers around the world.

In **Mk 13:9-13** Jesus warns us: "**But be on your guard. For they will deliver you over to councils, and you will be beaten in synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them. 10 And the gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations. 11 And when they bring you to trial and deliver you over, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit. 12 And brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death. 13 And you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.**"

Christians endure under persecution. We are sealed with the Holy Spirit. The prophet told us in Ezekiel that we would receive a new heart and God would put His Spirit within us and "cause [us] to walk in [His] statutes and keep [His] judgments" (**Eze. 36:36**).

One of my favorite verses in the Bible is **Jude 24-25**, "**Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, 25 To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.**"

In our darkest, most brutal hour, we can be assured that won't have to be anxious even about what we are going to say! **Verse 11**, Jesus says, "**do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit**".

### **The First Wave of Persecution**

The first great wave of persecution was brought on in the year that the book of Mark was written: 64AD. In that year, Nero would blame the Christians for

burning down Rome in the famous fire that destroyed most of the city. He destroyed Christians with a vengeance. **Peter** dies this very year in this persecution. **Paul** would die in 67AD.

Nero hated and mocked Christians. He gladly and brutally tortured and killed them. They were covered with the hides of wild animals, and torn to pieces by dogs and lions. They were often nailed to crosses. And when the day waned, they were commonly set ablaze on fire, serving as evening lights in Nero's gardens.<sup>3</sup>

### **Modern Persecution**

According to the World Evangelical Alliance, over 200 million Christians in at least 60 countries are denied fundamental human rights solely because of their faith.

Persecution is on the rise in China, Africa, India, and in the Arab lands.

According to the Voice of the Martyrs ministry, More Christians have been killed for their faith in the 20th century than have been martyred in the total history of Christianity.

### **Persecution is increasing**

This persecution began in the first century. But it has continued unrelentingly for the last 2000 years. This persecution will continue until the Lord comes, but it will increase before He comes.

The *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* (Vol. 33, No. 1: 32) estimate that approximately 176,000 Christians will have been martyred from 2009. This compares to 160,000 martyrs in 2000, and 34,400 at the beginning of the 20th century. This number will go beyond 210,000 per year by 2025.

**Application:** Christianity is not something we simply live for, but we must believe it no matter what our laws or freedoms are. Thank God that we live in a free land. We cannot take our freedom for granted. It may be taken away as we near the end. We must be ready to be persecuted. We read of the triumphant church in heaven in **Rev. 12:11**, "And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death."

Remember the words of Jesus:

- **Mt 5:11** "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account."

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<sup>3</sup> Carrington, Phillip, *The Early Christian Church* (1957); Davis, William Stearns, *Readings In Ancient History* (1913); Duruy, Victor, *History of Rome and the Roman People, vol V* (1883).

- **Mt 10:22**, “and you will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.”

**Application:** Don’t be attached to your comfort. The purpose of life is not our comfort, but our holiness. We are to love nothing and no one more than Christ. This world is coming to a close. You may be rejected by family and friends because of Christ. There’s coming a time soon when all Christians will be looked upon as unreasonable.

As believers we are unfashionable. We are to be the antithesis of this world. We are to stand as a light in the darkness. We must have thick skin and a big heart. We are going to suffer. **2Ti 3:12**, “Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted”.

**3. The Destruction of the Temple.** The end begins with the destruction of the Temple. Now remember that the Gospel of Mark is being written around 64AD and the Temple is still standing.

Jesus uses language from the book of Daniel to describe the desecration of the Temple. He calls it the “abomination of desolation”.

**Mk 13:14-18**, “But when you see the abomination of desolation standing where he ought not to be (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. 15 Let the one who is on the housetop not go down, nor enter his house, to take anything out, 16 and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak. 17 And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! 18 Pray that it may not happen in winter”.

The language described here points to the destruction of the Jewish Temple. Jesus used language taken from the book of Daniel, which describes the dramatic scene **Antiochus Epiphanes** when he desecrated the Temple the first time in the second century BC. The abomination in that case was the offering of a pig on the altar of burnt offering. Antiochus essentially went insane over his hatred for the Jews. He set up an image of Zeus in the Jewish temple and made the Jews bow down to it, and he sacrificed a pig on the altar of burnt offerings. He desolated and desecrated the Temple by setting up an abomination there.<sup>4</sup>

These verses seem to describe the terrible suffering in the first Jewish wars, when Roman armies invaded Palestine. This took place only a generation after the death of Christ, and the Jewish Christian church would have shared in the general suffering. Tradition says that the Christians fled to Pella in Transjordan, taking Jesus’ warning to heart to “flee to the mountains” (vs.

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<sup>4</sup> G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren *Theological dictionary of the Old Testament, Volume 4*, 296.

14).<sup>5</sup>

#### 4. **Great Tribulation...**

Now the language changes from the destruction of the Temple in 70AD and begins to point us forward to the very end of time. It speaks of a time of tribulation such as never was or ever will be.

**Mk 13:19-20**, “For in those days there will be such tribulation as has not been from the beginning of the creation that God created until now, and never will be. 20 And if the Lord had not cut short the days, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect, whom he chose, he shortened the days.”

There are going to be unbearable apocalyptic disasters taking place at the end of the age and such desperation, that people will seek comfort in false christs and false teachers. They are so powerful that they could “lead astray, if possible, the elect” (vs. 22b).

**Mk 13:21-23**, “And then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'Look, there he is!' do not believe it. 22 For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform signs and wonders, to lead astray, if possible, the elect. 23 But be on guard; I have told you all things beforehand.”

Be on guard. Be ready for the persecution, and be ready for awful suffering. There will be cataclysmic disasters so unthinkable that “if the Lord had not cut short the days, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect, whom he chose, he shortened the days” (vs. 20).

*Transition:* Our final point is simple and obvious.

## IV. Be attached to **Jesus Christ**, and look for His coming (Mk. 13:24-33).

We now hear from our Lord His own prediction of His Second Coming. Listen to what Jesus says in **Mk 13:24-27**, “But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, 25 and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. 26 And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. 27 And then 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.”

We see very clearly here that when Christ comes, the sun, moon and stars are destroyed and are “falling from heaven”. That’s pretty intense. Jesus coming will be cataclysmic. It is at this point that we read that Christ “will send out the angels

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<sup>5</sup> Carson, D. A., *New Bible commentary* (Mk 13:1–37).

and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven” (vs. 27).

The lesson of the Second Coming is found throughout the New Testament. Prophecy is not to make us curious or speculative. We are not to waste our time on *sensationalism* and *speculation*.

Thinking on Jesus ought to make us more evangelistic. It ought to make us more holy!

**1 John 3:2-3**, “Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. 3 And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.”

**Conclusion;** None of us know the day or the hour of Christ’s coming. Jesus is clear on that!

**Mk. 12:32-33**, “But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 33 Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. 34 It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. 35 Therefore stay awake--for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning— 36 lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. 37 And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake.” Don’t be sleeping!

- While we don't know the exact day nor hour of His coming, we can be ready when He comes! He calls us to have our oil lamps trimmed and to have our wedding garment on. Are you dressed in the righteousness of Christ and filled with the Spirit? If not, come to Christ today, and you will drink of a fountain of living water.
- Are you attached to anything in this world? Let go of it. It will all be gone soon enough. Are you sleeping in your Christian walk? Wake up! Are you earnest and urgent about your ministry for Christ? Will he find you awake and alert or are you sleeping. May God give us the grace to be watching and waiting for His coming. We may see Him at any moment.