

Introduction

1. Last Sunday morning at our Sunrise Service, Deborah called my attention to our maple tree.
 - a. In the early morning light, we could see the first leaves coming out that had appeared overnight.
 - b. The maple leaves come out late. They are an indication that spring is here and summer is just ahead.
 - c. Jesus used a similar visual illustration with His disciples concerning their question about WHEN the end will occur.
2. James Brooks writes, “Just as the leafing out of fig trees indicates the nearness of summer in Palestine, so the things spoken by Jesus indicate the nearness of his return. Jesus used a fig tree in his illustration because, whereas in Palestine most trees are evergreens, the fig tree loses its leaves in winter” (James Brooks, *Mark*, 216).
3. Jesus told His disciples the parable of the fig tree as a means of instructing them to keep watch for the signs of His return.
4. **Read Mk 13:28-37.**

A. A Lesson from the Fig Tree (28-31)

1. Previously, Jesus had used a fig tree to teach a lesson (cf., Mk 11:12-14,19-25) about having faith in God that is evidenced by your actions. The fig tree in that earlier parable symbolized the temple priesthood which like the fig tree gave signs of bearing fruit but was ultimately barren.
2. As Jesus and His disciples set on the verdant Mt. of Olives, Jesus pointed to a nearby fig tree and used it as an object lesson or parable for His disciples.
 - a. It was springtime and the buds and new leaves were coming out on the fig tree.
 - b. We know from experience that these are signs of spring and a promise that full leaves and fruit are coming in summer and fall.
 - c. So Jesus said that when they experienced the things in this prior teaching, then they would know that the end was coming.
3. Jesus dropped an interpretative bomb in verse 30 when He said, “Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.” Who does He mean by “this generation”?
 - a. Brooks notes, “The nearest antecedents are the coming of the Son of Man and the gathering of the elect in vv. 26-27, but it is not likely that either Jesus or Mark would have said that when people see the coming of the Son of Man they could know that he is near. . . . The events of vv. 24-27 constitute the end, not things that must precede the end. . . . Therefore ‘these things’ and ‘all these things’ must refer to the events of vv. 5-23 and especially those of vv. 14-23” (Brooks, 216).
 - b. As we saw in the last lesson, the events of vv. 14-23 most likely relate to the coming destruction of the temple by the Romans in CE 66.
 - c. Brooks also notes, “. . . the term ‘this generation’ . . . refers to the contemporaries of Jesus. . . . some of his disciples, would not die until the things of vv. 5-23 had happened. . . . To a limited extent v. 30 answers the first question in v. 4 [concerning WHEN the end will come] (Brooks, 217, insertion mine).
4. So, why have we not yet seen “. . . the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory”? (26)
 - a. There is still something to be fulfilled. Perhaps another “abomination that causes desolation” beyond that of CE 66 is yet to come near to the actual end of time.
 - b. Jesus will address the WHEN issue even more specifically later in v. 32.
 - c. One thing is certain, everything Jesus said will be fulfilled since, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away” (31).
 - 1) Jesus’ words in v. 31 remind me of the words given by God to Isaiah, “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it” (Isa 55:9-11).
 - 2) Daniel Akin concludes, “Nothing is so true, stable, permanent, and abiding as the word of our Lord” (Daniel Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Mark*, 317).

B. Keeping Watch to the End (32-37)

1. Daniel Akin notes, “Few subjects spark greater interest than the study of eschatology, the ‘end times.’ Christians and non-Christians alike are fascinated by the issue, even if they are skeptical about much of what they see. Unfortunately, much of this skepticism is warranted when you consider the spectacularly erroneous predictions of so many pseudo-prophets and prognosticators. No one has swung and missed more than the Jehovah’s Witnesses, whose false predictions currently stand at nine (1874, 1878, 1881, 1910, 1914, 1918, 1935, 1975, and 1984). In 1988, many evangelical Christians looked rather foolish when they were seduced by Edgar Whisenant’s *88 Reasons Why the Rapture is in 1988*. Not to be outdone, New Age advocates cited Mayan calendars and predicted the end would come on December 21, 2012. They of course were wrong too. I could continue down this tragic trail for quite some time” (Akin, 307).
2. The expression “that day” refers to the Old Testament “Day of the Lord” (cf., Am 5:18-20; Zeph 1:7,14-16; Zech 14:6) when God returns to judge the world and vindicate His own. In the New Testament, the Day of the Lord is associated with the return of Jesus, the Second Coming (cf., 1 Th 5:2; 2 Th 2:2; 2 Pe 3:10; 1 Cor 5:5; Phil 1:6,10; 2:16).
3. Jesus seems to say that even He doesn’t know when the end will come. This poses some doctrinal concerns as we affirm Jesus to be both fully God and fully man.
 - a. If Jesus is fully God, then why doesn’t He know what God the Father knows?
 - b. Akin notes, “This statement makes no sense apart from the incarnation. In taking on a human nature and entering into the time-space reality, the Son of God did not surrender His deity, but He did lay aside His glory (John 17:5; see also Phil 2:6-11). In doing so, our Lord for a time relinquished the free exercise of His divine attributes such as omniscience. In the mystery and beauty of the incarnation, the all-knowing sovereign Son could temporarily lay aside or suspend the free exercise of His ‘God attributes’ so that He might live an authentic human life in submission to His Father and in dependence on the Holy Spirit” (Akin, 317).
 - c. I believe that Jesus often had supernatural insights into the thoughts (e.g., Mk 2:8) and needs (e.g., Mk 5:30) of others during His ministry but that these insights came only by revelation from God’s Spirit to Him.
4. Jesus does not tell us WHEN the end will come, but He does tell us WHAT to do until then.
 - a. Again, Jesus affirmed that we must “Be on guard! Be alert! (Gk., *blepete agrupneite*)” (v. 33)
 - b. The word “Be on guard” (Gk., *blepete*) has been used by Jesus as a connecting theme throughout this passage (cf., vv. 5, 9, 23, 33).
 - c. However, in the closing verses, Jesus used a special word “keep watch” (Gk., *gregoreite*) which means “to be roused from sleep; awake and alert to avoid being taken by surprise” – the name Gregory comes from this word).
 - 1) “keep watch” (v. 34) – Used to describe the activity of a servant guarding the master’s door
 - 2) “keep watch” (v. 35) – an imperative form, a command to believers
 - 3) “Watch!” (v. 37) – This is the last word of the passage and again is a command to us.
 - d. Brooks notes, “The opposite of being on guard, being alert, and watching is sleeping. It is a symbol of spiritual lethargy” (Brooks, 218).
5. The final command to “Watch!” in v. 37 is no accident. This has been the theme throughout the discussion of end times (cf., vv. 5, 9, 23, 33). We must not be deceived. We must know the signs of the times. We must be faithful and working to the end.
 - a. We have work to do proclaiming the gospel to all nations (cf., Mk 13:10).
 - b. We must be faithful in spite of persecution, ready to share our testimony, and alert to the signs of the times and the needs of the day.
 - c. Jesus’ coming is sudden and imminent. So, we must live like His return is today and plan as if it is a thousand years from now.
6. In Luke’s account Jesus expands on this warning, ““Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap. For it will come on all those who live on the face of the whole earth. Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man”” (Lk 21:34-36).
7. We should not be deceived or anxious about the end times. We must be watching and working to the end.

8. In the next lesson we will begin the Passion Narrative, which is found in Mark 14-16, and provides the ultimate climax to the book by showing that the initial identification of Jesus as the Messiah in Mk 8:29 is in fact true (cf., Mk 15:39 – A Roman centurion speaking about Jesus says, “Surely this man was the son of God”).

C. Questions/Thoughts for Reflection

1. Do you worry and fret about the end times?
2. What work do Christians in general and you in particular have to do as you await the Lord’s return?
3. How would you respond to someone who says that he/she knows the precise date of Jesus’ return?
4. How would you respond to someone who says that Jesus could not come now because the things that are supposed to occur before His return haven’t all happened yet.
5. Are you keeping watch and doing your work with Jesus or worrying about the current times and the end?