

Focus on Mark 13:1–8

WHAT is important to know?

—From *“Exegetical Perspective,”* Robert A. Bryant

Jesus commands his disciples to remain calm in the unsettling events to come (v. 7a), for the approaching natural disasters and human-created catastrophes are necessary (vv. 7b–8). That is, evil is rampant in the world, it affects the earth itself, and it produces its own terror. But God’s judgment and rescue are sure. The proliferation of false prophets, wars, earthquakes, and famine are but “birth pangs” (cf. Gen. 3:14–19; Isa. 13:8; 26:17; Jer. 4:31; Hos. 13:9–13; Rev. 6; etc.) of God’s final judgment and the full establishment of the messianic age of God’s rule. Jesus’ followers may trust that God is in control.

WHERE is God in these words?

—From *“Theological Perspective,”* Emilie M. Townes

In keeping with other apocalyptic literature, Jesus uses signs and events of the day to signal the coming of the end of the current age. Yet with this end is the birth of the new age. Remarkably, in the midst of the predictions of destruction, if not annihilation, lie the seeds of salvation. It is rough sledding to help hearers of the Word continue in the midst of apocalyptic warnings once one knows that simplistic proclamations of humanity’s wickedness or craven faithfulness will simply not do. The theological heft of salvation loses its power with such appeals. Rather, we should explore how we move from darkness to light, from alienation to divine community, from guilt to pardon, from slavery to freedom, from the fear of hostile powers to liberty and assurance. In short, what it means is that through abiding faith, we receive salvation through God’s grace.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

—From *“Pastoral Perspective,”* Rodger Y. Nishioka

Various groups have created their own versions of an end-time clock to tell us how close we are to Christ’s return. Some interpret each day’s events in light of this text, claiming some secret revelation about God’s plan for the last days. Jesus’ warning is more potent than ever. Certainly every generation has heard the voices of those who boldly claim that they are privy to insider knowledge about when Christ is returning. That is what makes the subject of the end times so attractive and so treacherous. We, like the disciples, can become so focused on discerning the signs of the times that we neglect our more important mission to witness to the gospel today.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

—From *“Homiletical Perspective,”* Pete Peery

The Markan scholar Lamar Williamson reminds us that every Gospel writer leaves the church with a challenge. John calls the church to love one another. Matthew and Luke call the church to engage in mission to the Gentiles, to those who are “other.” These are daunting challenges. But perhaps the most daunting challenge for Christians in the North American context, so set on instant gratification, is this one left for us by Mark: “Beware, . . . keep awake,” watch, resist, hold out for the coming of Son of Man.

Scenarios of End-Time Predictions

Choose one or more of these case studies and write some notes about how you might respond to them. If possible, write out a Bible verse to back you up. For example, in Mark 13:32 Jesus says that no one knows the hour when he will return. In each response include what followers of Christ are to do while waiting for Jesus to come.

The Street Corner Preacher

While you are waiting for a bus a young man is holding a Bible and preaching loudly to the captive crowd. He claims to be anointed by God and has been told by God that the end of time is very near. He begins to list all the latest wars and diseases and sins of humankind that prove the biblical verses he cites. According to his careful biblical calculation, a world war will begin soon in the Middle East. When it is finished, Jesus will come again.

Based on today's reading, how might you respond to someone in the crowd who asks you if this is true?

Questions about "Left Behind"

A friend of yours at church has been reading the Left Behind series. She is fascinated about what will happen after Jesus returns and who will be saved and who will be left behind. She also spends considerable time trying to discern which current events are mentioned in the Bible that might be precursors to igniting the end of time.

Based on Mark 13, how might you respond to her?

Youth's Questions

A middle-school child in the church tells you one of his classmates said the world will end next year. The classmate said the Bible is a secret codebook and Jesus left concise instructions in it which, if carefully studied, prove when the world will end. The classmate's Sunday school teacher also said the world will end sometime next year.

Based on Mark 13, how might you respond to the youth?