

Looking and Living

Running for Our Lives

Cradling his rifle in the crook of his arm, a hunter was following an old logging road nearly overgrown by the forest in the wilds of Oregon. It was nearly evening, and he was just thinking about returning to camp when a noise exploded in the brush nearby. Before he had a chance to lift his rifle, a small blur of brown and white came shooting up the road straight for him.

The hunter said, “It all happened so fast, I hardly had time to think. I looked down and there was a little brown cottontail—utterly spent—crowded up against my legs between my boots. The little thing was trembling all over, but it just sat there and didn’t budge.” Wild rabbits are frightened of people, and it’s unusual to see one—let alone have one sit at your feet.

While the hunter was puzzling over this, another player entered the scene. Down the road—maybe twenty yards away—a weasel burst out of the brush. When it saw the man—and its intended prey sitting at his feet—it froze in its tracks, its mouth panting and eyes glowing red.

It dawned on the hunter that he had stepped into a little life-and-death drama of the forest. The cottontail, exhausted by the chase, was only moments from death. The man was its last hope of refuge. Forgetting its natural fear and caution, the little animal instinctively crowded up against him for protection from the sharp teeth of its relentless enemy.

The hunter did not disappoint the little cottontail. Raising his rifle, he shot into the ground just underneath the weasel. It leaped into the air and rocketed back into the forest. For a while the little rabbit did not stir. It just sat there, huddled at the man’s feet in the gathering twilight. “Where did it go, little one?” the hunter asked. “I do not think he will be bothering you for a while. Looks like you’re off the hook tonight.” Soon the rabbit hopped away from its protector into the forest.

That rabbit had an uncertain future. It was running for its life, and it just happened to “luck out” by finding refuge in one who was greater than its enemy. Sometimes we also feel like we are running for our lives. The predators of our past—trouble, worry, fear, and uncertainty of the future—can wear us down to the point where we feel like the weasel is going to win. But the Bible says, “Call upon me in the day of trouble and I will deliver you and you shall glorify me.” No matter how rocky and uncertain life may seem, we are promised a bright future. Jeremiah 29:11 says, “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you. Thoughts of peace and not of calamity, to give you a future and a hope.”

No matter how troublesome life may become and how uncertain our future may seem, run to your protector and huddle at his feet. He stands with his arms wide open. In Mark 13 Jesus warns us about the future but does not want us worrying about the future or even trying to figure it out. Jesus, in his humanity said, “I do not know when these things will occur.” His focus was not on figuring out the future but on remaining faithful to his mission. How can we do this? By staying close to the Father. We also must focus daily upon him.

PRAYER:

There are times, Lord, when I find myself worrying and stressing out about my future. I do not want to live my life fretfully but faithfully. Help me to “huddle at your feet” when I begin to think that the weasel is winning. Help me remember that you are my life and I am seated in heavenly places with you. Help me live each day as a gift from you and know that I have a future and a hope because your thoughts toward me are thoughts of love and care. In Jesus name, Amen

Jesus has given us a glimpse of the future here in Mark 13. How will this information change our lives? How will we live life differently? Does Jesus want us to make some key changes in our lives? Mark 13 points out that the best thing we can do is to follow Jesus’ instructions concerning the future and live by not worrying about the future despite all the events we see around the world and to keep watching and be alert.

A. The King Is Coming (13:24–27)

Jesus prepares his people for the end times by describing his triumphal return as the Son of Man

Let’s begin with Mark 13:3

Jesus has just left the Temple proper and is sitting on the Mt. of Olives facing the temple as he rehearses this glimpse of the future and shares it with 4 of the Apostles. Imagine this scene as Jesus is looking at the Temple knowing that in a few short years not one stone will be left upon another. He knows that there will be disciples left on earth to go through that time and he wants to leave this message of hope and this glimpse of the future for them and also for us.

Mark 13:24-25

But in those days, following that distress,

Jesus wanted to give his people hope in the midst of persecution and pain, especially during the tumultuous times that would follow the destruction of the Temple. He did so by describing his return as the conquering king of the cosmos.

After the end of “those days” Jesus begins speaking of a time that is after the destruction of the Temple, referred to as “that distress” and will be a time marked by certain events just before his second coming

The phrase **in those days** is an Old Testament expression referring to the end times (cf. Jer. 3:16, 18; 31:29; 33:15–16; Joel 3:1) This time also marks the time that precedes his second coming. Before Jesus returns, there will be spectacular celestial phenomenon and cosmic disturbances that the world has never seen such as **the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give**

its light. The imagery and language is similar to the Old Testament descriptions of the “Day of the Lord”—another phrase for the end times in the Old Testament (Isa. 13:9–10; 24:23; 34:4; Ezek. 32:7–8; Joel 2:10;30–31).

Needless to say, there has been centuries of debate over the exact references of these verses and their fulfillment. But what we need to concentrate on today is the following verses.

13:26–27. The return of Jesus will not be seen by just a few people, as was true of his entrance into the world when he was born in a manger. This time **men will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.** The reference here is to Daniel 7:13. This is the first time Jesus definitely connected the title “Son of Man” with the Daniel prophesy (cf. Mark 14:62).

All of humankind will see the Son of Man as the ruler of this universe. His major concern will be to gather his people together so they might share in this time of triumph. The phrase, **gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens,** has a dual meaning. Not only will he send his angels to gather his people from the ends of the earth but apparently the angels will gather his elect from the ends of the heavens, those in the heavens who have gone on before will also be with him to celebrate his triumph.

B. Signs of the Time (13:28–31)

Jesus prepares his people for the end times by instilling hope in the midst of horror.

13:28. After showing the infinite power of God, Jesus wanted to make certain truths personal. He did so by ending this chapter with two key illustrations. The first illustration centered around the fig tree. In Palestine most trees remained green throughout the year, with the exception of the fig tree. During the fall the fig tree would lose its leaves. In the spring the sap would fill the branches and the tree would begin the process of putting forth its leaves. By observing the fig tree people were able to see that summer was not far away. Jesus did not want his disciples to despair about the persecution they would face. Jesus was showing that just as he promised there would be persecution, he promises that deliverance will follow through his return as the Son of Man.

13:29. The phrase, **these things,** could refer to the events surrounding the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 or to the events immediately preceding the end of the age. This phrase could relate to the phrase, “all these things,” in verse 30. This also could be a dual reference for both the near prophesy of the fall of Jerusalem and the coming end times. If this is the case, then Jesus was referring to the events most likely to affect the believers at that time, which would be the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. But he may have been referring as well to the end times.

The next phrase, **it is near,** may also be translated as “he is near.” Again, a dual interpretation of this phrase is possible. Jesus may have been referring to both the near future for the disciples of his day and the distant future for those of us who live in this

day. Jesus wants to always assure his children through all of these centuries that he is always near to each one of us.

13:30. The phrase, **I tell you the truth**, calls attention to what Jesus was about to say: **This generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.** The understanding of this verse hinges on two phrases: **this generation** and **all these things**. There are several ways to understand the phrase, “this generation.” It could be applied to humankind in general, Israel, or Christians in general and unbelievers. In this case, “all these things” could refer to the events described in verses 5–23.

At the same time, however, the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and return of Christ all seem to go together. God’s desire is that everyone repent. He could be holding back the last stage of the coming of the end times (cf. 2 Pet. 3:9–10). This understanding of “all these things” would make “this generation” mean that the return of Christ is at hand for every generation.

13:31. Jesus was clear that his word is absolute. Literally, **heaven and earth will pass away.** There will be a new heaven and a new earth, but Jesus’ words will last forever. They are certain. His words will be authenticated by the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and culminated in the fulfillment of his second coming, which will be seen by the whole world.

C. Pay Attention (13:32–37)

Jesus prepares his people for the end times by exhorting them to be ready for his return.

13:32. Jesus was serious about his followers being vigilant during the time before his return. He emphasized the need to pay attention four times in six verses: be alert (v. 33), therefore keep watch (v. 35), do not let him find you sleeping (v. 36), and watch (v. 37).

The phrase, **that day**, refers to his second coming. Even though certain signs have been given about that day, no one knows, **not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.** Even Jesus does not know. This shows clearly his humanity. Jesus purposely laid aside the exercise of his deity—in this case his ability to know all things past, present, and future—as a consequence of his human existence. Jesus answered one of the key questions of the disciples, “When will these things happen?” Jesus declared that **he did not know and they should not worry** about it. Even at Jesus’ ascension, he clearly said to the disciples that it was not for them “to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority” (Acts 1:7).

13:33–36. The emphasis of this parable is a stern exhortation to **be on guard** because Christ could come back at any time. Like a doorkeeper who must watch because he does not know when the owner will return, they also must be on guard. The four times—**evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn**—were the four watches of the night used by the Romans. A constant vigil must be kept because he could arrive **suddenly**.

13:37. Jesus ended this discourse the way he began it—with an exhortation to **watch**. He emphasized this for **everyone** as well as the disciples. All believers in every age must watch without worrying. Jesus exhorted all believers not only to keep watch

for his return but also to watch out so nobody would deceive them and rob the house, he wants us to be on the alert at all times. Temptations and pressures would come, causing troubles and despair. His followers were to watch out for these things as well. Do not let anything derail you from your task of sharing the gospel and remaining steadfast in trusting the Lord.

D. Watch; be on guard; be alert (13:5, 9, 23, 33)

Waiting to be interviewed for a job as a Morse code operator, a group of applicants paid little attention to the sound of the dots and dashes that began coming over the loud speaker. Suddenly, one of the applicants rushed into the employer's office. Soon he returned smiling. "I got the job," he exclaimed.

"How did you get ahead of us?" the other applicants asked.

"You might have gotten the job if you had not been so busy talking that you did not hear the manager's coded message," he replied. The message said, "The man I need must always be on alert. The first one who interprets this and comes directly to my private office will be hired."

Jesus warns us repeatedly in Mark 13 of the need to stay alert and "tuned in" to him. If we do that, we will not miss how **he is working in our lives today**. We will be ready when he **returns for us in the future**

PRINCIPLES

- Believers can rely upon the Holy Spirit's sustaining power in the midst of persecution and problems.
- Believers can have absolute confidence in the certainty of God's Word.
- Believers are commissioned by God to preach and share the gospel, especially in light of Christ's imminent return.
- Believers are to live life consciously and not complacently