

Being Ready for the King

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[0 : 00] Friends, I wonder if you've been sitting for a while, so how about you stand with me and we'll pray and ask God to help us.

Father God, we thank you for the revelation that you have given us of your Son. We thank you for that interpreted for us in Scripture. And Father, we pray that today you would help us to understand these Scriptures and help us to live in the light of them.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, friends, please sit down. And I'll just find my place here.

Well, friends, today you might remember that last week I introduced the whole concept of the temple to you. And today I want to build on that a little bit. And I want to start in much the same way as I started last week.

That is, I want to tell you a story about the temple. Now, remember, friends, that the temple is a place and tabernacles are the place where God is present among his people and present for his people.

[1 : 18] Now, let me tell you the story about the beginning and end of a particular temple. The time I want to tell you about is the temple that Solomon built.

Now, let me give you some background. In the book of Deuteronomy, we are told that the people of God stand on the edge of the promised land. And as they do, Moses speaks God's word to them.

And in that word, he tells them that God will provide a place for them when they go into the land. And of course, we find out later in the Bible that that place was known as Jerusalem.

And there in Jerusalem, Solomon built a temple. It was a grand building. God blessed his efforts. In 1 Kings 9, God consecrated the temple and he promised that he would put his name there.

His eyes and his heart would be there at all times. But he also gave a very sober warning to Solomon and all who came after. He clearly and categorically said that if Solomon or his sons turned away from him and his laws, then he would cut Israel off from the land that he had given them.

[2 : 33] He would reject his temple. Though the temple was exalted, God would act. He would cause the temple to be a heap of ruins and an object of ridicule among the nations.

And with that ominous threat, let me tell you what happened in the history of Israel. You see, the kings of Israel did sin. They did turn away from God and they did turn away from God's laws. And the prophet Ezekiel gives us this graphic description of what God did.

In chapter 7, we're told in Ezekiel that the land in God's view was full of abominations. Then in a vision in chapter 8, God shows Ezekiel that those abominations are being committed in the very center of the city, in the temple itself.

Idolatry is being committed in its very courts. Dark and abominable deeds are being carried out there. And as Ezekiel looks on, God shows him even greater abominations.

And God promises judgment, just as he'd warned Solomon. And then God begins to execute it. He starts with the very temple itself. He orders the death of those who are guilty.

[3 : 41] He defiles the sanctuary with their corpses. And then as Ezekiel looks on, in the vision in chapter 10, the most remarkable thing happens. For God causes his glory to be lifted from the temple.

Born on the wings of cherubim, they move east. They pause at the east gate of the city. The glory of God stops there. The leaders of the city are gathered together before God.

Sentences passed. Ezekiel intercedes for the people. God characteristically relents and promises that he will gather his people together again in the future. And he will remove all the detestable and abominable things from there.

God will give them a new heart. Put a new spirit within them. Their hearts of stone will be replaced with hearts of flesh so that they might be able to follow his statutes. And keep his ordinances.

They shall be his people. And he shall be their God. But those whose hearts continue to be focused on abominations will be judged. And with that judgment announced, the cherubim lift their wings again.

[4 : 49] God has done his inspection of his city and of his temple. He's found terrible things. And now he leaves. God and his glory depart from the city. And the glory of the Lord stops on a mountain east of the city.

In other words, if we know what happens, the glory of the Lord stops at the Mount of Olives. Friends, these prophecies were fulfilled in history. God's people were judged for their sin.

They lost the temple of Solomon. God allowed them to build another. And the one that they finally did build in Jerusalem was even more grand than the one Solomon had built.

Now last week, we heard that God's son, who we know from the book of Hebrews, is the very reflection of God's glory and the exact representation of his nature, visited his temple.

He saw the abominations being performed in it by the leaders of God's people. He pronounced judgment upon it. And then he exited the city.

[5 : 51] And now in chapter 13, verse 3, he sits on the Mount of Olives, where the glory of God had rested in the day of the judgment of the last temple.

And he begins the longest speech recorded in Mark's gospel. Now, friends, before we get underway, I need to supply you with one more little bit of information from chapter 12. If you've got your Bibles there, it's not on your outline, but if you've got your Bibles, turn to chapter 12.

And I want you to look back at chapter 12 to the story of the tenants in verses 1 to 11 of chapter 12. Remember what happens in that parable of the tenants?

Judgment is passed. The owner of the vineyard will come, says Jesus. He will destroy the farmers. He will give their vineyards to others.

And then in verse 10, he quotes a scripture. The quotation is from Psalm 118, verses 22 and 23. And Jesus says, Have you not read this scripture?

[6 : 49] The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes. What Jesus is doing by quoting this scripture is that he is asserting that he will be the new cornerstone, the new cornerstone of the new temple.

That is, he will be the place where it is grounded. He will be the place upon which it is built. Despite being rejected by the builders, that is, the religious leaders, God will raise him up.

Despite the fact that he's going to die, God will raise him up to be the cornerstone of a new edifice, a new temple. He will be the focus of God's healing. He'll be the focus of God's forgiving presence.

Through him, prayers will be offered to God, the Father. And in him, the nations will find shelter and access to God. And this is from the Lord, and it's marvellous in our eyes. Friends, if I can give you just one extra bit of information, because it will come up in our examination of Mark.

Sorry, that's that one extra bit of information. But I want to tell you now how we're going to proceed. Today, what I want to do, knowing that there's so much in this chapter, and much of it's debated, and much ink has been spilt trying to understand it, I intend taking a quick run through it, and flesh out how I think we ought to interpret it.

[8 : 09] And then I want you to think about it. You won't agree. Let me say now, I warn you now, you will not agree with all that I say. So you look out for the spots where you don't agree with me.

That's okay if you don't agree. Go back and examine the scriptures yourself. Ask God to help you understand them. Ask God to help me understand them better if you think I'm wrong. And then come and talk to me about it. I love to talk with people about scripture, because as we grapple with scripture, the door of growth to godliness opens up for us.

And God has given us the Holy Spirit to help us understand. Anyway, once I've told you about what I think the passage means, I want to tell you two stories that come before it and after it, that'll help us apply this passage.

So let's have a look at Mark chapter 13. Now in verse 1, and you've got it out on your outlines there, in verse 1, we see Jesus leaving the temple. Now earlier that day, at the conclusion of the parable of the tenants, he had spoken about stones and builders.

And now the disciples come to him and they speak of stones and buildings. They say to Jesus, look teacher, what massive stones.

[9 : 22] What magnificent buildings. Now you've got to think about this for a moment. You see, the disciples have witnessed the acted out parable of the prophetic, the prophetic parable of the fig tree, haven't they?

They have seen Jesus denounce the use of the temple. They have heard him speak against religious leaders and assert his authority over them and over the temple. And now they go talking about this marvelous building that's not going to exist for much longer according to Jesus.

They clearly have not understood, but that's not new. They don't understand very well in Mark's gospel at all generally. Just as they don't hear and understand about Jesus and his coming death, so they don't hear and understand what he says to them about the temple and its fate.

They don't understand that he's the rejected stone, the basis of the new temple. And so he pushes it home to them. He uses the language of stones and buildings again, and he puts it bluntly.

He says, do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left upon another. Everyone will be thrown down. He's saying, look, these buildings are going to be dismantled.

[10 : 27] The tenants are going to be punished and removed. The new temple is going to be raised, and it's going to be given to new tenants. Anyway, the great thing is that the disciples seem to have grasped it at least this much because they go on and they seek to clarify the meaning.

Four of them come to Jesus separately, and look at what they ask in verse 4. They ask Jesus, tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?

And with this, we move on to verses 5 to 23. Now, I want you to have a look at verse 5 and verse 23, the beginning and the end of this section. Look at verse 5. Jesus says, watch out that no one deceives you.

Now look at verse 23. Jesus says, So be on your guard. I've told you everything ahead of time. Actually, the word is the same as the one used in verse 5, so you could perhaps better translate it this way.

And you, watch out. I've told you everything ahead of time. And the same word is used again in verse 8. We could translate it this way. Verse 9, we could translate it this way.

[11 : 33] And you, watch out for yourselves. I wonder if you can see what's going on. Jesus is saying, Be vigilant, wakeful, watching, have a guarded attitude, a guarding attitude.

And with that in mind, let's have a look at verses 5 to 8. Friends, as we get into this passage, I reckon it is so easy for us to immediately think, from verse 5 on, that these verses are about the end of time.

But I want to urge you not to be too quick to come to that conclusion. You see, unless the disciples have totally misunderstood Jesus again, they are after the answer to two questions, aren't they?

Do you remember what those two questions were? When will these things happen? What things? The temple and its end. Two. What will be the sign that these things, that is the temple and its end, are about to be fulfilled?

They are asking about the temple. This is the focus of our passage. The focus of our passage is not necessarily the end of time, but the end of the temple. Now, one or two places, I think it goes beyond the end of the temple.

[12 : 43] But the passage is fundamentally about the end of the temple. And in verses 5 through to 8, you use traditional prophetic language borrowed from the Old Testament.

It's language that's often used in prophetic oracles against Jerusalem. False prophets and deceivers are going to abound before the fall of, abounded before the last fall of Jerusalem, and they'll abound before the next fall of Jerusalem and its temple.

Birth pangs abounded before the last passing away of the temple. They'll abound before the next one. So, for example, you can see this in the Old Testament.

In Jeremiah 4, there's an oracle against Jerusalem. And it closes with the daughter of Zion in anguish and travail with birth pangs. By the way, look at verse 7 here in front of you.

It talks about the end. Now, I don't think that's the end of time. I think it's the end that Jesus had promised. That is, it's the end of the city and the temple prophesied in Daniel chapter 9 through to 12.

[13 : 48] Keep this in mind. We're going to come back to Daniel. Now, let's turn to verses 9 to 23. Now, to get a grip on what's going on here, you need to have a close look at verse 10. Look at it.

Verse 10. Let me read it to you. Jesus says, And the gospel must first be preached to all nations. The word for nations here is only used twice in Mark's gospel.

Here, and a chapter or two earlier on. Do you remember when Jesus went into the temple the first time? Do you remember when he went in there and he saw, and he, sorry, the second time he went in on day two, and he saw it and he said, This is to be a house of prayer for all the nations.

That's the other time nations is mentioned. You see, the prophets longed for the nations to gather to worship the true God. It had been God's purpose before Israel even existed, that all people would be in fellowship with God and have access to him.

And now what Jesus is saying is that through the preaching of the gospel, this can happen. Gospel proclamation will be God's way of fulfilling what the temple had failed in.

[14 : 57] It'll be part, as you pronounce the gospel, the disciples do, they will be part of the replacement of the temple by proclaiming the gospel. However, as these verses make clear, gospel proclamation will come at a cost.

See, gospel proclamation cost Jesus, didn't it? And the disciples of Jesus will experience what Jesus has already experienced and will experience.

And that's what those verses are about. But now let's move to verses 14 to 20. In the introduction to this talk, I deliberately emphasised that God found abominations in Solomon's temple.

Those caused him to exit the temple. The book of Daniel focuses on an event later on in history where a Greek king called Antiochus Epiphanes desecrated the temple by erecting a desolating sacrilege on the altar of burnt offering in the temple.

This event is linked to a time of suffering and it culminates in the complete destruction of the temple. And that's where the term abomination of desolation or that causes desolation comes from in Mark 13 verse 14.

[16 : 08] Can you see it there? Mark is telling us that the events of Antiochus Epiphanes are about to be repeated. He tells his readers, understand. That's what that little statement means.

Understand. Look for the abomination of desolation mentioned in the book of Daniel. Look for it in your own day. And do not be like, he's saying to his readers, do not be like the disciples.

Look. Hear. And unlike the disciples, understand. It's going to happen in your day. And when you see it happen, act quickly.

Flee the city of Jerusalem, for the days will be severe like nothing else. Friends, Jesus has already declared the temple to be under the judgment of God.

Jesus is not committed to this temple. Therefore, his disciples ought not to be either. Therefore, they should flee.

[17 : 06] The events being described here happened according to the word of Jesus. Jesus. In 70 AD, the temple was desecrated. It was destroyed.

And the word of Jesus was fulfilled. And there is all that is left of it today is a wailing wall. Now, let's turn to verses 24 to 27. Jesus says, But in those days, following that distress, the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light.

The stars will fall from the sky and the heavenly bodies will be shaken. And at that time, people will see the son of man coming on the clouds with great power and glory. And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.

The verses up to this point in Mark have been talking about the destruction and desecration of the temple in 70 AD. It's now possible.

It is possible that these verses refer to that as well. However, it's not clear from the verses. We do know, don't we, that the desecration of the temple is a sign of the destruction of the temple.

[18 : 15] The destruction of the temple is a sign of the coming of the son of man. The first has actually happened in 70 AD. The temple was desecrated.

It was destroyed. But there's no indication that the next thing has happened. And so we wait. We wait for the definite sign.

We wait knowing the definite sign we have from Jesus has already occurred. Now sometime after the distress of 70 AD, the portents of verses 24 and 25 will happen.

Sometime people will see the other events of Daniel taking place. Sometime people will see the son of man coming on the clouds with great power and glory.

Sometime he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens. Sometime. Friends, please understand this.

[19 : 16] The signs preceding verse 26 have already occurred. There are no more clues that we have. And we are not to spend our time doing calculations.

We are not to spend our time scanning history and natural disasters and saying, that's the one. We are to be vigilant. We are to anticipate that the next thing coming, the next really big thing coming, is the coming of the son of man.

And we are to get on with preaching the gospel so that people are ready when he comes. For on that day, the elect who have responded to the gospel with faith and faithfulness will be gathered to him.

Now, let's just turn quickly to 28 to 37. Let's see if we can get the general gist. In verse 28, Jesus talks about fig trees again. This time he uses fig trees for a slightly different purpose.

You see, Jesus says that you get signs in a fig tree that summer is coming. So, you'll get signs that the coming of the son of man is near. And as I've already explained, we already have the main sign.

[20 : 21] The temple has been desecrated and destroyed. The final hour is coming. So, what is our task as we wait for it? Look at the last few verses and look at the words that repeat themselves.

Be on guard. Be alert. Keep watch. And finally, watch. Friends, please listen to these words of Jesus and take them on board.

Be vigilant. Be valiant. Be active in the ministry of gospel proclamation. For our Lord is returning. Do not be found sleeping when he does.

Now, I wonder if I could just wrap up this talk by wandering outside our immediate passage. You see, just before our passage and just after our passage, we have the stories of two women.

And I think they help us understand what we should do with the stuff that's in between. Two women. The story immediately before Mark 13 is the story of the widow at the temple who gives two small copper coins.

[21 : 29] We saw her last week. In the other story that comes immediately after or just after Mark 13, we have the story of a woman who spends a lot of money on some perfume and she anoints Jesus with it.

I put it in your Bible reading there so that you've got it in front of you. Now, these two stories are unusual in a number of ways. Let me explain. Look at chapter 12, verse 43.

Jesus says, Truly I say to you. And then he goes on from that to praise this widow. Now, if you've still got that there, have a look at chapter 14, verse 9.

Jesus again says, Truly I say to you. And then goes on to praise the woman. So there's clear parallels between these two passages. These two women also are the only two people who are praised by Jesus in Mark's gospel.

Not just the only two women, the only two people who are praised by Jesus in Mark's gospel. They're very important people then. And their stories are very important. So let's have a look at their stories.

- [22 : 32] Look at the widow's story at the end of chapter 12. The amount of her gift is specified. Two copper coins. We are told that her gift is at great sacrifice.

Twice we are told she is poor. She is then contrasted with wicked men in their use of money. Who are the wicked men she's contrasted with? They are those, the religious authorities who devour widows' houses.

Her actions foreshadow the death of Jesus in that she gives all that she has. Literally, the Greek says, she gave her whole life. Next, the target of this widow's giving is doomed.

Because you see, Jesus has doomed the temple to destruction. And lastly, the value of her gift is misunderstood. It looks like two small copper coins.

But in reality, it's the expression of one who loves God with all her being. Now let's have a look now at the woman who anoints Jesus. Again, the amount of the woman's gift is specified.

- [23 : 37] Our version of the Bible says it's worth more than a year's wages. But the original says it's worth more than 300 denarii. As with the widow, we're told that the gift is at great sacrifice.

Again, the word poor is used twice. Once in verse 5 and once in verse 7. Just like the widow, this woman is contrasted with wicked men. Because in the passage, the verse immediately after this, we're told that Judas goes out to betray Jesus for money.

And just as the widow's actions foresaw the death of Jesus, so it is with this woman. Verse 8 says she anoints Jesus for his burial.

And so just as with the widow, the target of her giving is doomed as well, isn't it? Because if she's anointing him for his burial, it's a bit of a waste, isn't it, you'd think?

Jesus will die. Lastly, just as the widow's gift is misunderstood, so is this widow, this woman's gift. People think, oh, what a waste that is.

- [24 : 43] A whole year's wages, putting some oil on someone's head. What a waste. But Jesus says that she has done a beautiful deed for which she'll be remembered wherever the gospel is preached.

Now, let me see if we can hone in on the point of all of this. Friends, as I've shown you, these two stories have remarkable echoes of each other. They have similar themes.

But I want you to notice a very deep irony. Did you spot it? The widow in the first story is to be commended. She has done a great deed. We saw that last week.

She is expressing her love for God with all her being. She is expressing it by giving to a temple that looks grand and secure and permanent. But in reality, she is giving it to a temple that has become a den of robbers and which is condemned and which will end within 45 years.

Her money will therefore go into the coffers of those who devour the houses of widows and its value will end with that temple. It will go toward a grand temple but one which is about to be destroyed.

- [25 : 59] Her gift is therefore of limited value except as a demonstration of where her heart lies. Compare this to the woman with the ointment. Her gift seems so wasteful, doesn't it?

However, it is directed towards the embodiment of a new temple, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Jesus walking around looks pretty fragile at this moment.

And within chapters you'll see just how fragile his life is. And it is a life that will be destroyed as we'll celebrate in the coming weeks. Jesus will die.

But the grand thing is his death will not be an end. For he will rise from death to life. And the rejected stone will become the cornerstone of a new and uncorrupted temple.

And wherever the gospel is proclaimed, this prophetic act that she did will be announced and recounted. Although her gift is for his burial, he will rise.

[27 : 05] And the gospel will be proclaimed throughout all the earth. Friends, in the time of the end, these two women are model disciples.

They show the nature of true discipleship. Discipleship of Jesus is about the sacrifice of your whole self. It is not just the giving of money.

These two women highlight what true worth is. You see, a life sacrificed for Jesus is of lasting value.

A life lined up with Jesus is a life lined up with eternity. Friends, in these last days, as we wait for the coming of the Son of Man, I wonder what you are giving yourself for.

Is it for something temporary that will fade away? Or is it for something which will last? The cause of Jesus is eternal.

[28 : 16] The ministry of the gospel has eternal value. It will last long before the houses we live in, the houses that our children live in, the houses that our grandchildren live in.

It will last beyond the material goods that we hoard. It will last for eternity. Friends, hear the words of Jesus in Mark chapter 8.

Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves, take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it.

But whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?

Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? Friends, labor for the things that endure to eternity in these last days.

[29 : 22] Let us pray. Father, we thank you for these words of the Lord Jesus. We long for the time when he will gather his elect.

Father, we thank you for these two women who knew what it was to love you with all their heart, soul, strength and mind.

Thank you for their discipleship. Please help us, Father, not to seek to save our lives only to lose them, but to lose our life for you and the gospel, or for your son and the gospel, knowing that we will save it.

And that on that last day we will be gathered with all the elect on the day of the Son of Man. Father, we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[30 : 39] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Beside them. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.