

10. Predictions of the End

Biblical material: Mark 13:1-36.

Quotes:

- It's the end of the world as we know it and I feel fine. *R.E.M.*
- The most appropriate daily life for me was a day by day world destruction. Peace was the most difficult and abnormal state to live in... No moment is so dazzling as when everyday imagining concerning death and danger and world destruction are transformed into duty. *Yukio Mishima*
- Ah, the broad magnificence of that scene! How I shall laugh and be glad and exult when I see these wise philosophers who teach that the Gods are indifferent and men soulless, roasting and browning before their own disciples in Hell. *Tertullian, Ancient Christian Father*
- What the caterpillar calls the end of the world, the master calls a butterfly. *Richard Bach*

Introductory questions

Why the emphasis on the End-time? Why worry? Where should we place our trust? What is Jesus main emphasis here? What about date-setting? How to avoid seeming “cranks” when we talk about the End? From reading this passage, what do you conclude this says about God?

Discussion ideas

“In other words, as you read this discourse, however depressing in one sense it might be, we still have so many reasons to hope.” (Monday’s lesson). What do you believe are the reasons to hope? Mark 13 has long been studied as a theological piece. It is generally known as “the Little Apocalypse,” and some have concluded that it is a segment of Jewish apocalyptic with Christian overtones. However we do not need to treat it in such a way; rather we can see this as part of Jesus’ plan to prepare his disciples for both his death and the time between resurrection and return. Once again we see Mark using this scene to reveal the truth of God in Jesus.

What do you trust in? After the previous chapter, which relates to trusting in position and wealth, the disciples call Jesus’ attention to what they supposed would be something good to trust in—the temple of God. But Jesus totally rejects such an assumption, since they are looking at the situation from purely human terms. They are trusting in the *institution*, and not the God behind it all.

Jesus’ answer seems to be dismissive and shocking. So the disciples ask the obvious question, “When?” Jesus’ response to this is a composite of what will happen shortly, and what will happen at the very end, since the ideas are linked in the minds of his hearers.

Jesus is more concerned to help his followers rather than focus on a roadmap of the future. He warns against deception, to be on guard, not to be alarmed. Those that see these words of Jesus as only speaking about signs of the end miss the vital point that the only reason Jesus spoke this way was to aid Christians in maintaining their relationship with God. This again speaks so well of a God who shares with us all we need to know so we will not become alarmed or disappointed.

The strong warning against date-setting must be taken seriously. Nobody knows when! So why are there literally thousands of people predicting the End at a specific time? As humans we want to know “when?” But God wants the relationship now!

Ellen White Comments

As Christ's attention was attracted to the magnificence of the temple, what must have been the unuttered thoughts of that Rejected One! The view before Him was indeed beautiful, but He said with sadness, I see it all. The buildings are indeed wonderful. You point to these walls as apparently indestructible; but listen to My words: The day will come when "there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down."

Christ's words had been spoken in the hearing of a large number of people; but when He was alone, Peter, John, James, and Andrew came to Him as He sat upon the Mount of Olives. "Tell us," they said, "when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of Thy coming, and of the end of the world?" Jesus did not answer His disciples by taking up separately the destruction of Jerusalem and the great day of His coming. He mingled the description of these two events. Had He opened to His disciples future events as He beheld them, they would have been unable to endure the sight. In mercy to them He blended the description of the two great crises, leaving the disciples to study out the meaning for themselves. When He referred to the destruction of Jerusalem, His prophetic words reached beyond that event to the final conflagration in that day when the Lord shall rise out of His place to punish the world for their iniquity, when the earth shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain. This entire discourse was given, not for the disciples only, but for those who should live in the last scenes of this earth's history.

Turning to the disciples, Christ said, "Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in My name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many." Many false messiahs will appear, claiming to work miracles, and declaring that the time of the deliverance of the Jewish nation has come. These will mislead many. Christ's words were fulfilled. Between His death and the siege of Jerusalem many false messiahs appeared. But this warning was given also to those who live in this age of the world. The same deceptions practiced prior to the destruction of Jerusalem have been practiced through the ages, and will be practiced again. {DA 627-8}

Extra material

One interesting website is one that details supposed end-time prophecies under the title of "It's the End of the Word... Again." The problem with so many people claiming to know the date of the end, any in so many ways, that is becomes a matter of mockery.

One of the latest "prophecies" is that since the bible mentions "666," then the end of the world will occur on June 6, 2006! What is the basis for such an assertion? Nothing but the similarities in numbers. There are so many crazy ideas that for anyone (Adventists included) to come along and say, "well, we don't know the date but the world is certainly coming to an end," we would simply be lumped in with all the rest of the doom-sayers.

Take another similar example. The *Weekly World News* has nothing to say about 6/6/06. Rather they announce the arrival of Jesus at the seventh hour on the seventh day of the seventh month of 2007. Why not in the year 7777 one wonders, but of course that is not conveniently close enough, is it?

The whole point of date-setting seems to be to avoid Jesus' call to watch. As I've said before, if we knew Jesus was coming in the New Year, we'd wait to get Christmas over first. But the very uncertainty of the timing points to what God really wishes to achieve—a continuous relationship with his beloved children, so that whenever the end may come, individually or collectively, we shall be with him forever. That is why we can pray, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus." Because to be with God means the conflict is over, the answers done, home for ever.

11. Betrayed and Arrested

Biblical material: Mark 14:1-51.

Quotes:

- We are betrayed by what is false within. *George Meredith*
- When Judas betrayed Jesus with a kiss, it was a deep undermining of the love, loyalty and affection that greeting with a kiss conveys. *Bishop Geoffrey Rowell*
- Don't compromise yourself. You are all you've got. *Janis Joplin*

Introductory questions

Why were the religious leaders so keen to “dispose” of Jesus? Why was the incident of the perfume anointing the prompt for Judas’ betrayal? Was the “guest room” provision miraculous, or were there others following Jesus? Why did Jesus refer to his coming betrayal so obviously? What about the body and blood—what did he mean?

Discussion ideas

Right from the start of this chapter we see the evil intent to kill Jesus. And Jesus is very much aware of the plot of the priests, and then Judas’ decision to betray him. Even so he still goes through with the meal, with Judas present.

The anointing of Jesus is a delightful story in the increasing gloom. Here was at least one follower who wished to honor her Lord. And the carping, complaining of some of the disciples must have been a terrible disappointment for Jesus as he prepares for the climax of the conflict. This incident also speaks against “bottomline” theology that only accepts the pragmatic and basic. Jesus identifies her action as “something beautiful.” Again a perspective on God as He is.

Then they celebrate Passover together. This is more than the “inauguration of the Lord’s Supper,” it is Jesus still trying to explain in terms they could understand the kind of person he is, the God he truly demonstrates. He even makes it as clear as possible that he knows of Judas’ plan to betray him. God’s love goes to the ultimate, and yet allows rejection.

Jesus tells his disciples what they will do. He knows their characters. Peter protests. Would it have made a difference if Peter had been able to keep his promise? Whatever the answer, the disciples cannot keep watch with Jesus—they fall asleep. He does not even have the very human benefit of the support of his friends in Gethsemane. He is all alone.

“In this week’s study we see Jesus wrestling in the Garden of Gethsemane, struggling with the agony of becoming the Sinbearer for the world. If He turns back, we are eternally lost.” Sabbath’s lesson. Is this true, and if so why/why not?

When Jesus says he is sorrowful to the point of death, what did he mean? Is this poetic imagery, or was this actually true? When Jesus prays, and says to the Father that all is possible for God the Father—could Jesus be looking for another way forward? What does it mean to accept God’s will?

The arrival of the mob, armed with swords and clubs, ends the scene. What was this motley crew thinking—that they could take the Lord of the Universe with such primitive weapons? Then the betrayal with a kiss—more than symbolic, a crystal-clear proof of human rejection of the way God chooses. Imagine what this means. Jesus the rebel? The God of peace is taken with violence, to be unjustly tried, and then killed at our hands.

Ellen White Comments

Mary's act was in marked contrast with that which Judas was about to do. What a sharp lesson Christ might have given him who had dropped the seed of criticism and evil thinking into the minds of the disciples! How justly the accuser might have been accused! He who reads the motives of every heart, and understands every action, might have opened before those at the feast dark chapters in the experience of Judas. The hollow pretense on which the traitor based his words might have been laid bare; for, instead of sympathizing with the poor, he was robbing them of the money intended for their relief. Indignation might have been excited against him for his oppression of the widow, the orphan, and the hireling. But had Christ unmasked Judas, this would have been urged as a reason for the betrayal. And though charged with being a thief, Judas would have gained sympathy, even among the disciples. The Saviour reproached him not, and thus avoided giving him an excuse for his treachery.

But the look which Jesus cast upon Judas convinced him that the Saviour penetrated his hypocrisy, and read his base, contemptible character. And in commending Mary's action, which had been so severely condemned, Christ had rebuked Judas. Prior to this, the Saviour had never given him a direct rebuke. Now the reproof rankled in his heart. He determined to be revenged. From the supper he went directly to the palace of the high priest, where he found the council assembled, and he offered to betray Jesus into their hands. {DA 563-4}

Extra Material

“Betrayest thou the Son of Man with a kiss?” [Luke 22:48](#)

“‘The kisses of an enemy are deceitful.’ Let me be on my guard when the world puts on a loving face, for it will, if possible, betray me as it did my Master, with a kiss. Whenever a man is about to stab religion, he usually professes very great reverence for it. Let me beware of the sleek-faced hypocrisy which is armour-bearer to heresy and infidelity. Knowing the deceivableness of unrighteousness, let me be wise as a serpent to detect and avoid the designs of the enemy. The young man, void of understanding, was led astray by the kiss of the strange woman: may my soul be so graciously instructed all this day, that “the much fair speech” of the world may have no effect upon me. Holy Spirit, let me not, a poor frail son of man, be betrayed with a kiss!

“But what if I should be guilty of the same accursed sin as Judas, that son of perdition? I have been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus; I am a member of his visible Church; I sit at the communion table: all these are so many kisses of my lips. Am I sincere in them? If not, I am a base traitor. Do I live in the world as carelessly as others do, and yet make a profession of being a follower of Jesus? Then I must expose religion to ridicule, and lead men to speak evil of the holy name by which I am called. Surely if I act thus inconsistently I am a Judas, and it were better for me that I had never been born. Dare I hope that I am clear in this matter? Then, O Lord, keep me so. O Lord, make me sincere and true. Preserve me from every false way. Never let me betray my Saviour. I do love thee, Jesus, and though I often grieve thee, yet I would desire to abide faithful even unto death. O God, forbid that I should be a high-soaring professor, and then fall at last into the lake of fire, because I betrayed my Master with a kiss.”

Charles H. Spurgeon. <http://www.heartlight.org/spurgeon/0325-am.html>

12. Tried and Crucified

Biblical material: Mark 14:53–65; 15:1–41.

Quotes:

- If it has to choose who is to be crucified, the crowd will always save Barabbas. *Jean Cocteau*
- In each individual the spirit is made flesh, in each one the whole of creation suffers, in each one a Savior is crucified. *Hermann Hesse*
- Jesus did not die in bed. *Daniel Migliore, class lecture, Princeton Theological Seminary*
- We are punished by our sins, not for them. *Elbert Hubbard*

Introductory questions

Why did the Jewish leaders look for a charge to execute Jesus? Why not just have him killed? What are the attitudes of the high priest and of Pilate to truth? Why does Jesus not respond with blazing glory? Was not this his golden opportunity? Why not give the leaders of both the religious and political worlds a Bible study?

Discussion ideas

It's interesting that the Sanhedrin also believed in evidence. They were "looking for evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death." So the issue of evidence is not enough—you also have to ask about your attitude to evidence, your sincerity, the whole question of how you determine truth. For these leaders were not interested in the truth, they just wanted some basis to achieve their desire to kill Jesus. Even today, corrupt regimes seek spurious legality for their actions.

The trial is in reality a way of ensuring the judicial murder of Jesus. He knows this, but is still willing to respond to the direct question. He is the Christ, and adds to this his return in glory. This is all the high priest needs.

Sent to Pilate, Jesus does not try a defense. He agrees with Pilate's proposition that he is the king of the Jews, knowing what this would mean in a politician's eyes. Yet Pilate is unwilling to send a man to his death just to satisfy the Jewish leaders, who he clearly does not care for. The investigation continues. In all of this Jesus is representing God in the most difficult circumstances. The temptation was to demonstrate who he really was in a blaze of divine glory that would leave no possibility for doubt. But that action Jesus resolutely refuses to carry out, for it would compromise his mission.

Pilate caves in under the pressure, and after having Jesus flogged, send him to be crucified, releasing the murderer Barabbas. How the difference between the kingdom of God and that of Satan is made starkly obvious! So are the insults thrown at Jesus on the Cross. More than words, they are further temptations to give up, to act out of character, to retaliate. Imagine also the dreadful mockery of the high priests, who show their real spiritual condition.

Why did Jesus cry out as he did from the Cross? What are we to understand from this? In publicly dying, what is Jesus as God telling us? The darkness—what does that tell us? The rending of the temple veil—what is God communicating? All these things are for a reason, and we do well to think long and deeply on such subjects, reminding ourselves at all times that is God not only speaking to us but showing the full extent of his loving character. But is it: "*The whole purpose of the cross was merely to help us learn to trust God.*"? Friday's lesson.

Ellen White Comments

The Lord our Redeemer had not yet demonstrated fully that love to its completeness. After His condemnation in the judgment hall, His crucifixion on the cross, when He cried out in a clear, loud voice, “It is finished,” that love stands forth as an exhibition of a new love—“as I have loved you”—is demonstrated. {16MR 190}

Christ came to this earth, his divinity clothed with humanity, that humanity might touch humanity, and divinity lay hold upon the throne of God. In our behalf he became subject to all the temptations of Satan, and placed himself in the power of those who clamored for his life and crucified him as a malefactor. His death on the cross was an exhibition of the unselfishness of God. Infinite benevolence poured out all heaven's treasures in this one gift to rescue man from Satan's power. Through the revelation of the love of God on the cross of Calvary the real character of the work of Satan and his agencies was demonstrated. {SW, September 5, 1905}

The theme that attracts the heart of the sinner is Christ, and Him crucified. On the cross of Calvary, Jesus stands revealed to the world in unparalleled love. Present Him thus to the hungering multitudes, and the light of His love will win men from darkness to light, from transgression to obedience and true holiness. Beholding Jesus upon the cross of Calvary arouses the conscience to the heinous character of sin as nothing else can do. {Mar 99}

...the people were to accept Christ as revealed in prophecy, and to believe on him through the evidences which attended his mission. The Jews saw in Jesus a young Galilean without worldly honor, and, though he came as prophecy foretold he would come, they refused to accept their Messiah in poverty and humiliation, and crucified him, as prophecy foretold they would do. {3SP 65.2}}

To the angels, the course followed by human beings seems strangely inconsistent. They see how plainly degradation is revealed on the side of unbelief and indulgence of appetite. They see how untiringly Satan is working to destroy the image of God in man. They wonder why beings dependent on their Creator for every breath they draw act so unreasonably and inconsistently; why they choose the side of the one who crucified Christ and who has filled the world with strife and envy and jealousy. . . . {UL 321.2}

Extra material

“Whoever heard of a suffering God? The idea is plain daft. God is up in heaven, and there he will stay. But wouldn't it be wonderful if it were true? If God came to visit us, like a great king visiting his subjects? Or, even better, if he came among us as one of us, sharing our way of life, with all its tragedy, sorrows and grief?” Alister E. McGrath, *What Was God Doing on the Cross?*

“Even from the cross, when our Lord in his agony found perfection of his saintly humanity—even then he did not own himself a victim of injustice: They know not what they do.” Georges Bernanos, *The Diary of a Country Priest*

“The Crucifixion and other historical precedents notwithstanding, many of us still believe that outstanding goodness is a kind of armor, that virtue, seen plain and bare, gives pause to criminality. But perhaps it is the other way around.” *Mary McCarthy*

“To modern man in his frustration and despair, the full-orbed gospel of Christ... is the one message of hope. Christ crucified and risen is Lord of all; all the forces in the universe, well-disposed and ill-disposed, are subject to Him. To be united to Christ by faith is to throw off the thralldom of hostile powers, to enjoy perfect freedom, to gain the mastery over the dominion of evil—because Christ's victory is ours.” *F. F. Bruce*.

13. Buried—But Risen!

Biblical material: Mark 15:42-16:20.

Quotes:

- You can put truth in a grave, but it won't stay there. You can nail it to a cross, wrap it in winding sheets and shut it up in a tomb, but it will rise! *Clarence W. Hall*
- Why did Christianity arise, and why did it take the shape it did? The early Christians themselves reply: We exist because of Jesus' resurrection. ... There is no evidence for a form of early Christianity in which the resurrection was not a central belief. Nor was this belief, as it were, bolted on to Christianity at the edge. It was the central driving force, informing the whole movement. *N. T. Wright*
- Rise heart: thy Lord is risen. Sing His praise without delays, Who takes thee by the hand, that thou likewise with Him mayst rise: That, as His death calcined the to dust, His life may make thee gold, and much more, just. *George Herbert*

Introductory questions

Why couldn't the authorities come up with a better story to counteract the proclamation of Jesus' resurrection? Why didn't Jesus appear in glory in a public way to prove his resurrection? Why doesn't Mark give more information at the end of his gospel about what happened next? What does all this tell us about God?

Discussion ideas

The conclusion of Mark is very brief. Jesus rose again—that's it! Why? Because his gospel was written to answer who Jesus was and is. He has achieved his purpose, and in a sense everything else that happens later are just so many historical footnotes...

The essential picture that Mark has painted is of a God who is intimately involved in human affairs, who has come to show what he is like so that we—and all the onlooking universe—may believe that Jesus truly is God.

Without the resurrection the story is totally incomplete, and in fact, does not make sense. But Mark even here does not dwell on the miraculous—he just states the resurrection as fact. In all the historical details he supplies are the counter to the different theories that seek to explain away Jesus and Christianity. As the lesson points out, the disciples were hardly enthusiastic supporters who gave into wish-fulfilment. On the contrary, they were scared and trying to hide. Nor could a Roman centurion and his squad mistake when someone was dead. Jesus had a Roman death certificate! All the ideas that Jesus just "swooned," and revived in the coolness of the tomb make no sense. No, Jesus was truly dead. And if the body had mysteriously been taken, how? What about the Roman guard? Even the Jewish leaders got desperate and tried to bribe them to say the body had been stolen...

No. Nothing makes sense except the story as told. This is the conclusion of many, scholars and others, even those initially sceptical. Even *Time* magazine agrees! (March 28, 2005).

So who is this Jesus? He is Almighty God, everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. He is in truth and in fact God himself, come to live among us, die at our hands, so that *everyone in the universe* could have clear and undeniable proof of how God acts, who He is, why He loves. All this to bring about the restoration of harmony throughout all his creation—including us!

Ellen White Comments

Christ's first work on earth after His resurrection was to convince His disciples of His undiminished love and tender regard for them. To give them proof that He was their living Saviour, that He had broken the fetters of the tomb, and could no longer be held by the enemy death; to reveal that He had the same heart of love as when He was with them as their beloved Teacher, He appeared to them again and again. He would draw the bonds of love still closer around them. Go tell My brethren, He said, that they meet Me in Galilee. {DA 793}

Christ in His life, His death, and His resurrection; Christ as He is manifested by the Holy Spirit, is the treasure of the New. Both Old and New present truths that will continually reveal new depths of meaning to the earnest seeker. {CT 462-3}

Ask God to reveal light and truth to you by His Holy Spirit, that you may understand what you read in His Word. When, after the resurrection, Christ walked with the disciples to Emmaus, He opened their understanding that they might understand the Scriptures. The same divine Teacher will enlighten our understanding if we keep the windows of the heart opened heavenward and closed earthward. The office of the Holy Spirit is to bring all things to our remembrance and to guide us into all truth. {TMK 202}

Extra material

I write these study notes during my visit to the Commission on Human Rights in Geneva. Staying at the college in Collonges, France, I attended church. The Sabbath sermon focused on the different images of God as seen in paintings and statues of Christ from different cultures. The representations came from such diverse cultures as Haiti, India, Ethiopia, Cameroon, Japan etc. The expressions on the various faces of Christ were very different—serene, troubled, anguished, generous, hostile, friendly... The preacher commented that though we have different cultures and different histories, it's essential not to put our cultures at the heart of faith. "Our message is not cultural, but based on the world of God," he said. "Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ'. (Romans 10:17 NIV)." And the very first verse he used was this: "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." (John 14:9 NIV).

It's true. All the way through his gospel, Mark has been trying to do what he said right at the very beginning, to give "the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God." (Mark 1:1 NIV). In every scene, every word, Mark is illustrating and demonstrating the truth about God as revealed in the person and ministry, the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

As we have looked again at these words and works of Jesus, as we have answered afresh the question "Who is Jesus?" we have caught a renewed vision of God made manifest in Christ. May we all come closer to our loving Lord as result, in loving delight of his truth, and secure in the trustworthiness of such a divine Being who answers the accusations made in the great controversy with such wisdom and grace, proving through personal demonstration just who He truly is.

"For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." (2 Cor. 4:6 NIV).

