

## Daily Bible Study

### *“An Exhortation to Watchfulness”*

*Mark 13:28-37*

*October 7 – 13, 2012*

**THE LORD’S DAY & MONDAY** –This week after about 4 months away from Mark’s gospel we return to our study of our Lord’s “Olivet Discourse” as it is called. We will be taking **Mark 13:28-37** as our text as we finish this somewhat difficult and controversial chapter 13. If you remember, in **verses 1-23** of this discourse, our Lord Jesus was answering the disciples’ questions concerning the destruction of The Temple. They had asked *when will these things be* and Jesus had answered them. Then, as we moved into **verses 24-27** we came to a section that many Christians believe to be about the Second Coming of Jesus at the end of time as we know it. We paused and cautioned to not rush ahead with any or all of our presuppositions and learned behaviors but to just step back and look at the Scripture closely. By this time in the text many Christians have clearly moved to the final “end” of time. To be fair, on the surface it does sort of sound like the final return of Jesus, right? But is it? Or, was it possible Jesus was still describing events pertaining to the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the age of Temple worship with its shadows? We now continue with the Lord giving His disciples a ***Call to Watchfulness***, telling them to be watching for signs that would tip off the events He predicted. Let’s look at the text: **Mark 13:28-37**: *“Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender, and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see these things happening, know that it is near—at the doors! Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away. But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is. It is like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch. Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming—in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning—lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!”*

*Suggestion for Prayer:* *Father, teach me from Your Word as I study this piece of Scripture.*

**TUESDAY** – **Mark 13:28-29**: *“Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender, and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see these things happening, know that it is near—at the doors!”* Right from the beginning I would again remind us to not miss the point of Jesus Words here. His admonitions to watch

have replaced His predictions of future events. This is very important for us to understand. Jesus is concerned with His men listening to His Words and obediently believing them and seeing them verified to be true and accurate. The branches of a fig tree or other fruit trees for that matter (**Luke 21:29**) become soft and tender because they are generating and building up sap. As soon as the life giving sap gets into the branches they begin to produce leaves. When this happens the disciples and we today even realize that summer is near. Jesus says to His men that similarly, when during their life-time they *see these things happening*, (the things such as constant recurring earthquakes, famines, wars, and so on as well as “the sign” of the abomination of desolation, the approaching Roman armies) they are to understand and *know that it is near—at the doors!* That the end for Jerusalem and its temple is near, it is like sitting on the doorstep. Furthermore, we seem to see the matter of immediacy in this illustration. Jesus is saying that like the quick turning of the seasons to spring with leaves etc... so when these things begin to take place the event He has been describing would also take place very soon.

*Suggestion for Prayer:* *Father, thank You for being in total control of all things including the future. Help me trust You, who “declares the end from the beginning” (Isaiah 46:10).*

**WEDNESDAY** – **Mark 13:30-31**: “*Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.*” These two verses contain the statement that makes the Olivet Discourse so difficult. Before we look at the statement of “*this generation*” lets again reinforce what we saw yesterday; namely, that in this **verse 31** we find Jesus is assuring His men that His words will come to pass. In short, He Word is reliable to be trusted. Jesus refers to the Heaven and earth passing away. He is speaking about the prophetic disclosure that the world as we know it will one day be changed, it must be renewed, there must be a New Heaven and New Earth (**Romans 8:18–22, 2 Peter 3:10,13, Revelation 21:1–5**). The point he is making is that the physical universe around us, no matter how stable it appears, is unstable and temporary but His Word on the other hand will continue to prove stable and trustworthy forever and ever (**Isaiah 40:8, 1 Peter 1:24-25**). His Words will *by no means pass away* (strong negative implying a strong affirmative). Now we turn to the statement of **verse 30**. The question that has raged for centuries is what and who was Jesus speaking about when He said, “*this generation*”? Was He using the word literally for those living then as He spoke or was He using it in a figurative sense? Without looking at this word *genea* in all of Scripture, in Mark it is used 4 times by Jesus and He is referring each time to those presently listening to Him in matters that concern them. We will touch more on these difficulties of interpretation at the end of the week but suffice to say, there is no reason to not take this statement in its most basic literal sense. He is again speaking of the “very soon” immediacy element of the destruction of the Temple.

*Suggestion for Prayer: Father, help me to pay attention to the warnings You give in Sacred Scripture concerning Your Divine Judgment and my necessity to listen and obey. Thanks and praise be to you Jesus for bearing my deserved penalty upon yourself.*

**THURSDAY** – **Mark 13:32-33:** “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is.” Yet once more, like in **verse 5, 9, and 23** we see Jesus takes the time to drive home the point of being prepared and watchful. Notice His call to be alert, “on guard” if you will, and do not miss His injunction for the men to pray. Is this not a necessary and neglected item concerning all of us as believers? We would do well to learn and heed Jesus command to pray. We should pray when we *know* what is taking place as well as when we *do not know*. A constant communion with God in prayer keeps us focused and looking to Him where we find strength, answers and power for living. The first verse in this section is also one that gives many Christians trouble. They say, If Jesus was God, how did He not know the *hour*, the precise timing of the event He has just predicted? The simple but true answer is that in His Incarnation Jesus had a limit to His knowledge in His human nature. His Divine nature was not diminished yet in some instances and concerns we find Scripture revealing that Jesus laid aside His divine prerogative to know all details of all events and as a genuine man trusted The Father as He calls us to do as well. We see this principle illustrated for us in **Philippians 2:5-11**. Some people may also have trouble saying His prophecy could be trusted if in fact He did not know precise timing but that is not true or realistic since His not knowing the precise *hour* did not negate His prophecy in the least. We know it will snow this year yet we can’t precisely say when. Jesus as a human man chose not to be in the know concerning all information but trusted Himself to The Father. Here is also a place where many Christians say Jesus must be referencing the final coming and His return at the end of time because of His admission. I think we have seen that does not have to be the case but we can learn a principle here concerning studying and debating “prophecy”. If neither the angels nor Jesus himself as man but only The Father knew the timing of this prediction how ridiculous and presumptuous is it for us to act like we have all the timing, answers and “secrets” concerning all prophecy and declarations of the oracles of God? God has hidden some things from us and it is wise for us to admit and accept this in and with a humble ignorance.

*Suggestion for Prayer: God, help me trust that Your Word will come true as You see fit regardless of how I or anyone else perceive or understand it. Thank You for always working for the good of Your people. Help me remember to pray and commune with You always.*

**FRIDAY & SATURDAY** – **Mark 13:34-37:** “It is like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the

*doorkeeper to watch. Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming—in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning—lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!”* Remember that earlier in this chapter Jesus gave these men clues and signs of this approaching calamity and told them when they saw these things taking place they were to flee Jerusalem (**13:14**). Obviously we are not living in that day but we must receive and learn from the major thrust of this final portion which is ***An Exhortation to Watchfulness***. Jesus underscores the importance for His men to watch and be ready for this massive calamity by giving them an illustration of a man leaving his estate and travelling only to return at a time not known to His servants. He was saying that His prophecy could be fulfilled suddenly with very little warning. Because of this fact the disciples need to take heed and not be sleepy but watchful. In closing out this study of The Olivet Discourse let’s look at a basic difference how one handles it for interpretation. The way a person views Jesus’ coming and the timing plays a major roll on how they see and interpret the passage. You can either interpret Jesus language about His coming in a figurative sense and His references to time and timing in a literal sense or vice versa. Many Christians through the centuries have chosen to see the time references of the discourse including such statements as “*this generation*” of **verse 32** as figurative. In **verse 32** they would say that Jesus is not referring to the living people of that *generation* but is rather referring to a type of people (unbelievers, an ethnicity, or anyone living when this prophecy would in fact come to fulfillment). Many Christians that see Jesus speaking to the distant future and His final return have held this view in an attempt to save the text from criticism from apparent difficulties. On the other hand, one can take the time references literal and Jesus words about “His coming” in a figurative sense. This I would argue is the more natural and consistent way to interpret and make sense of the text. In taking this approach I would say that Jesus did in fact “come” in A.D. 70 as He came in power and judgment against a system of shadows and its unrepentant and hardened adherents who refused to see Him as the Messiah and repent and believe in Him. We avoid difficulties in attempting to defend Jesus as a true prophet and His Word as being reliable if we understand it this way. With that said, I understand there are many believers who see this passage in a different manner and we will all one day have the answers God sees fit to give us. But until that day let us never miss the main point of the entire discourse... *Take heed, watch and pray... And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!*

*Suggestion for Prayer:* *Father, thank You that regardless of how we see some of these details in Sacred Scripture, You are not at all confused and You will unfold Your plan through eternity for the good of Your Elect children. Praise You, who was and is and is to come!*