

Mark 13:1-37

THEME SENTENCE:

Judgment is certainly coming: be ready for it. (And don't be put off by 'the signs of the End' now.)

1-4 judgment is coming!

The disciples (as always cf 8:32b; 9:34; 10:37 etc) are impressed by the impressive-seeming. But Jesus says plainly here what he's hinted at since 11:1. Since Judaism is fruitless, it will wither from the roots (11:12-21; 12:9). The Temple is the centre of Judaism, and therefore the centre of this fruitlessness, so its end is inevitable (13:2). This provokes two questions in 4 which really are asking Jesus: are you in charge of this world and its future?

5-31 we can know for sure that judgement is coming

5-23 'not-the-End',
but the signs of 'the End'

sign #1 false prophets (5-6, 21-23)

What characterises these false prophets are exaggerated claims and signs and miracles. Because the very real danger is that 'the elect' may be led astray, we're warned: do not be deceived.

sign #2 catastrophe (7-8)

7-8 is the stuff that fills our newspapers, but all of that is only the 'birth-pangs' of something even worse to come. Worry and fear are a natural response, so 'don't be alarmed' is a good practical warning.

sign #3 persecution (9-13)

Opposition to Christians will come from every conceivable quarter, but God's purpose through it all is clear: the worldwide spread of the gospel. The instruction to disciples is: speak out fearlessly and stand firm.

sign #4 sacrilege (14-20)

'Let the reader understand' (14) implies that we'll understand what Jesus means if we think about it. As usual, the meaning is in the OT, referring to the desecration (Dan 11:2) and destruction (Dan 9:25-27) of Jerusalem and its Temple. This happened in 167BC (with Antiochus Epiphanes) and again AD70 (with the Romans), and will repeat (cf 2 Thes 2:3-10; 1 John 2:18). Note though (20), that even in the midst of this awfulness, God is sovereign.

All four of these signs are the kind of things that every generation can expect to see, and any/all of them may suggest the world is out of control, but of course it is all happening exactly as the God-in-control had said it would!

24-27 'the End'

Here is the security we have in a world which has rejected its king: the king will return. It will be a terrible day when all God's wrath is unleashed against his enemies (cf contexts of Isaiah 13:10; 34:4). But it's also a glorious day for 'the elect', vindicated as the returning owner gathers them to join him in his other-worldly kingdom.

28-31 know that 'the End'
is coming ... soon!

(NB this fig-tree is nothing to do with 11:13!) The key thing here is that 'these things' in 29 refers to the signs in 5-23; 'these things' in 30 refers to 'the End' in 24-27. So when we see the four signs, we will know that he's near. Because all these signs repeat throughout history, every generation should expect the Second Coming. Of course!

32-37 be ready for judgement

32-37 an application:
live in the light of 'the End'

The important thing is that the servants need to be ready when their master returns. This is exactly what Jesus has been teaching since 8:31 – to follow Jesus is to live for the next world. Here the point is made even sharper: we have been given evidence (in seeing 'the signs' in our generation) that Jesus is about to return. Are we ready?

'Watch' cannot mean that we are to engage in the elaborate reconstructions of some (eg the EU is 'the abomination' etc). But rather get on with our 'assigned task' (34). The chapter is sandwiched by stories of two women (12:41-44; 14:3-9) who help us to understand what this might look like.