

March 29, 2020

Mark 13:1-8, 24-37

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

The Book of Mark is most likely the first of the four gospel books to be written, sometime in the late 60s CE. In reading today's selection it's important to remember or learn, about the Siege of Jerusalem in the year 70 CE. It was the decisive event of the First Jewish-Roman War, in which the Roman army captured the city of Jerusalem and destroyed both the city and its Temple. So Mark writes his gospel (the first) as or after this war and destruction takes place.

Today's selection follows and continues a section of conflict between Jesus and his political opponents which began at his triumphal entry into Jerusalem (the story of Palm Sunday) in Mark 11. Since his arrival in Jerusalem, (the political, social and religious capital of the Jewish people) Jesus has been butting heads with the leaders. Here Jesus gives up and pronounces his judgement against the Temple, revealing what he sees to be true.

Mark 13 is called the Apocalyptic vision of Mark. It's important to remember that the word *apocalypse* (a Greek word) means "a revealing or disclosure of what actually is" as opposed to a doomsday battle with which it's often associated.

the temple This was the epicenter of Jewish life and the Jewish nation – the place where heaven and earth met. The space in which God's presence dwelled and could be encountered through prayer and sacrifice. It was the place on earth where they believed God could be found, spoken with, heard from. It's destruction would mean the absence of God in the world. If there is no Temple where would one seek God?

Not one stone : The Roman general Titus, who led the final siege of Rome, destroyed the Temple so that no stones were left standing. All that is left is what we now call the "Wailing Wall" in Jerusalem, which was was of the walls of the foundation upon which the Temple had been constructed.

he was sitting ...opposite the Temple : This is the same physical situation, which represents "judgment" that we encountered in last week's reading about the woman who gave all she had in Mark 12:41-44.

in those days : this is a commonly used expression in the First Testament to refer to the "Day of the Lord" (what some today call the end times). It is a time of eschatological transformation, described poetically by darkness, and earthquakes, when the world as we know it is shaken and remade. It's the day of judgement of the wicked, the enemies of Israel, and salvation for Issaël through a climactic manifestation of the glory of God. For similar uses of this expression and the poetic descriptions of God's active glory check out: Joel 3:1-16; Jeremiah 31: 21-37, 33:14-16;

¹ As [Jesus] came out of **the temple**, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!" ² Then Jesus asked him, "Do you see these great buildings? **Not one stone** will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down."

³ When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite **the temple**, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately, ⁴ "Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?" ⁵ Then Jesus began to say to them, "Beware that no one leads you astray. ⁶ Many will come in my name and say, 'I am he!' and they will lead many astray. ⁷ When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. ⁸ For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of *the birth pangs*. ...

²⁴ "But **in those days**, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened,
and the moon will not give its light,
²⁵ and the stars will be falling from heaven,
and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

²⁶ Then they will see '*the Son of Man coming in clouds*' with great power and glory. ²⁷ Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

²⁸ “From the **fig tree** learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. ²⁹ So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that *he is near*, at the very gates. ³⁰ Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. ³¹ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

³² “But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³ Beware, **KEEP ALERT**; for you do not know when the time will come. ³⁴ It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. ³⁵ Therefore, **KEEP AWAKE**—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the **evening**, or at **midnight**, or at **cockcrow**, or at **dawn**, ³⁶ or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. ³⁷ And what I say to you I say to all: **KEEP AWAKE.**”

QUESTIONS FOR THE PRACTICE OF EXAMEN & CONTEMPLATION

- What part of today’s story grabs you?
- Imagine yourself as one of the Jews in the wake of their destruction by Babylon and then oppression by the Romans. How would you hope for God to avenge what you might have lost: property, jobs, people, family, freedom. What would you see as the justice that God should give to your enemies and to you?
- The word apocalypse, going back to the original Greek, doesn’t mean “the end of the world” but rather the revealing or disclosure of how the world truly is, what God is up to. What is Jesus saying about the Temple and where God can be found in the world?
- Today feels like an apocalypse in this season of COVID-19. What is being revealed or disclosed about how God is in the world, or how the world truly is?
- What invitation to walk, act, speak, or relate to others do you hear in the text today?

...Isaiah 13:6-11 – among others. So Jesus is talking about the end of the world as we know it, in terms of evil seemingly winning over those devoted to the ways of God. The language is intended to describe something that is beyond the limits of words: to be read more poetically than literally, more metaphorical than scientific.

Fig tree This is a metaphor that Jesus repeatedly uses to talk with his disciples about the ways in which the Temple Institution and power-base has forsaken its path and been unrouted. He’s already spoken of it in Mark 11:12-14 and 11:20-25..

KEEP AWAKE | ALERT This refrain is often used in eschatological parables and teachings of Jesus. Here Mark is relating either that Jesus foreshadows what will happen in the coming time when he’ll be arrested and the disciples will scatter, or Mark is teasing this out in retrospect as he tells the story. We see this most clearly as he talks to his disciples in Mark 14:37-38 “³⁷ Jesus came and found the disciples sleeping; and he said to Peter, ‘Simon, *are you asleep? Could you not keep awake one hour?*’ ³⁸ *Keep awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.*”

In verse 35 Jesus talks of times of the day...which are an outline of what will happen on the night of his arrest:

evening After the last supper he goes with his disciples to pray in the garden. They repeatedly fall asleep. He urges them to stay awake and keep watch with him. Mark 14:32-42.

midnight It’s in the middle of the night that Judas and the soldiers come to arrest Jesus. They arrive as he’s trying to rouse his disciples friends from sleep. Mark 14:41-43.

cockcrow It’s at the third crow of the rooster (cock) that Peter realizes his betrayal of Jesus (basically his failing to keep watch) in Mark 14:70-72

dawn It’s a dawn that his trial begins and he’s brought before Pilate and rejected by the crowds in Mark 15:1-15.