



The End of the Age

God's Triumph

About the Story

Today's reading is sometimes called "Mark's Mini-Apocalypse" because in it Jesus predicted the destruction of the temple, Jesus' second coming, and the gathering of the faithful. In our modern understanding, the word "apocalypse" is often seen as being about death and destruction, with post-apocalyptic movies showing desolated landscapes. At the center of Jesus' message though is a message of hope: God is ultimately in charge, even if the world seems to be falling apart.

The Point:

Trusting in Jesus, we can do God's work. Jesus has already commanded his disciples to follow him and to listen to what he says. Now he tells them to stay alert. Living out God's kingdom means following Jesus, listening to him, and watching for God's coming salvation.

The word "apocalypse" means revelation, the unveiling of a divine or otherwise unseen reality. Paul used the word "apocalypse" to describe Jesus' appearance to him on the road to Damascus (Galatians 1:12). An apocalypse was a dramatic reversal in life, an upheaval, a transformation in the way one sees the world.

Apocalyptic literature uses vivid and incredible (even surreal) images to communicate a message. Why the symbolism? There are a few explanations. One might be that the reality experienced in an apocalypse is so different from ours that everything real might seem unreal—and stars falling from heaven (Mark 13:25) would not be outside the realm of possibility. Another explanation is cultural context. Apocalyptic literature in the Bible is written for communities under threat. The story of Daniel was written about life under the Persian regime; the Book of Revelation was written during Roman persecution of Christian believers. Many scholars believe Mark's Gospel was written right around the time of the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE. If the temple had already fallen, Jesus' prediction that it would fall (Mark 13:2) would have been comforting because it showed that God was ultimately in control.

Apocalyptic literature is meant to comfort. The total upheaval of our world is devastating, and the writers of apocalyptic literature mourned that destruction with their communities. But, the writers promise, there is more to come! The end is only the beginning. What looks like disaster and devastation is actually the coming of something much grander than our reality—something more amazing than we can imagine or describe. Jesus promises that we need not be afraid (Mark 13:7).

But, as Jesus notes, we don't know the day or the hour (Mark 13:32). Apocalyptic events are not predicted in a chronological timeline. These revelations are less about days on a calendar and more

about living in faith. No matter what is happening, even if it looks like the world is falling apart, apocalyptic writings promise that God will have the last word.

So keep awake, Jesus says: the world is about to change.

Last Week/ Next Week

Last week Jesus was in the temple, debating with his religious opponents concerning the greatest commandment and teaching in public with the use of a widow's offering as an illustration. In today's lesson he leaves these public appearances behind and interacts with his "inner-circle" in private. Next week the lectionary actually flows backwards to Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem as well as moving forward to his anointing at Bethany.

Opening Prayer

God of hope, you dwell among us even when the world seems to be falling apart. Help us to remember your promises and trust in your unfailing presence. Send us into the world to share that hope with others. We pray this in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Into the Story

If you were going to tell the story of your family, where would you begin? What people in your Has there ever been a time in your life when everything seemed to be falling apart? How did you make it through that difficult time? What gave you hope? Go around the group and share your answers.

Learning the Story

Jesus tells his disciples that the temple in Jerusalem will be destroyed; they should beware of being led astray. He speaks of an unknown time when the Son of Man will come and that they should stay alert.

Read Mark 13:1-8 – The Destruction of the Temple

- ❓ What is your first reaction to Jesus' words?
- ❓ The temple was the center of Jewish life and worship. What would it have felt like to hear its destruction predicted?
- ❓ How do you imagine Jesus felt giving this prediction? Read verses 5-8 (aloud or silently) with a variety of tones: fierce, heartbroken, hopeful, etc.

Read Mark 13:24-31 – The Coming of the Son of Man

- ❓ If you have time, read Mark 13:9-13. These verses have a sadder, and perhaps scarier, tone than the verses before and after it. What do you make of these verses? What do you think the reason is for Jesus sharing these predictions with his followers? How do you think the persecuted community that was the original audience of Mark's Gospel would have understood these words?

- ❓ What do you think of the dramatic fall of the sun, moon, and stars? Can you visualize it? What could this symbolize or signal?
- ❓ Who do you think the elect are that will be gathered by the angels? What does it mean to you to be elected or chosen by the Son of Man?
- ❓ How can we understand Jesus saying, “This generation will not pass away” two thousand years later?

Bible Connections

- ✚ Jesus’ use of the term “Son of Man” comes from Daniel 7:13-14, where “one like a human being/son of man” comes in the clouds and is given dominion, glory, and kingship.
- ✚ The Gospels of Matthew and Luke also include this story, with notable differences; see Matthew 24:1-44 and Luke 21:8-36.
- ✚ Jesus will also speak of the destruction of the temple in John 2:18-22.

Read Mark 13:32-37 – Keep Watch

- ❓ Why do you think we do not know when the time will come?
- ❓ The metaphor of a man going on a journey does not necessarily work for us today. What could we say instead to explain these kinds of preparations?
- ❓ How do we keep awake? What does that look like?
- ❓ Where do you find hope in the passage for today?

Living the Story: Worship

For today’s Living the Story, you will sing together the hymn “Soon and Very Soon” by Andrae Crouch. Recordings of Andrae Crouch performing the song are available online by searching for the song title and his name on your favorite video or music service. Play the song and sing along, or, if your group would be more comfortable reading the lyrics together as a spoken prayer, that is fine, too. Discuss how the lyrics tie into Jesus’ message of keeping watch.

If you have time, go through your congregation’s hymnal or songbook and find other hymns or songs that have a similar message. Read or sing through the lyrics of a verse or two of each song.

Closing Prayer

When you are ready for the closing prayer, sing or read together “Soon and Very Soon” one last time as your closing prayer.

Bible Nuts & Bolts: What is the World to Come?

The phrase “Olam Ha-Ba” (the world to come) is used in the Hebrew Bible to refer to a future age of global peace. Most of the references to the World to Come in the Hebrew Bible saw God’s eternal kingdom inaugurated here on earth, in what is known as the messianic age. The messianic age would be a period of peace for all of creation, with people beating their swords into plowshares and no more wars between nations (Isaiah 2:4). This peace extends to all of creation. Wolves will lie down with lambs and children will play with snakes without any fear of harm (Isaiah 11:6-9). The earth will have no more hunger, war, jealousy, or rivalry. Jesus told his followers to keep awake, watching and hoping for this future, even in the midst of turmoil.

At Home

- ✚ What does keeping watch mean for you? How can you watch for the coming of the Son of Man in your daily life? Spend some time in reflection and look for opportunists to “keep watch” throughout the day.
- ✚ Continue your Lenten discipline from last unit’s Living the Story throughout the rest of Lent. If your group is no longer collecting donations, consider where you could donate funds to on your own, such as a local nonprofit or even a special ministry of the church.
- ✚ If the weather is nice this week, spend some time outdoors noticing the changing of the seasons. How does this relate to the Lesson of the Fig Tree in Mark 13:28-31?

Daily Readings**Sunday – Read Mark 13:24-27**

Jesus foretells the coming of the Son of Man. What images stand out to you? Draw a picture or write a poem using these images about the coming of the Son of Man.

Monday – Read Mark 13:28-31

Jesus compares the coming of the Son of Man to a fig tree. Spend the day in nature, taking in the changing of the seasons.

Tuesday – Read Mark 13:32-37

Jesus encourages his followers to keep watch. Say a prayer for all experiencing persecution.

Wednesday – Read 1 Thessalonians 5:1-5

Paul writes about the coming day of the Lord. Say a prayer of thanksgiving for all that God has done.

Thursday – Read 1 Thessalonians 5:6-11

Paul encourages the Thessalonians to keep watch. How can you keep watch?

Friday – Read Romans 13:11-14

Paul encourages the Romans to live honorably in Christ Jesus. Do a good deed or small act of kindness for a stranger today.

Saturday – Read Mark 14:1-2

The religious leaders hatch a plot to kill Jesus. Why do you think the religious leaders are planning to kill Jesus?