

## Sept 25<sup>th</sup>: Beware Pretenders: Mark 13

**Last Sunday I watched a programme on TV** that some of you may have seen. It was a report on a man in Queensland who claims to be Jesus come back to earth, and he has built up through the internet a worldwide following of thousands who accept his claim, **along with a large group of followers in Australia** who seem to passionately believe in him.

**He reckons that from an early age** he has felt in his body the things that Jesus went through such as the crucifixion, and has since performed many of the miracles that Jesus performed.

**Consequently he claims that he was Jesus 2,000 years ago**, and he is Jesus living on earth again today. **And the thing that really got to me** was that his followers in Australia, many of whom were shown gathered in a large hall, **transfixed it seemed** by his every word, could have been **any Australian church congregation**.

**From young children to** older people, with every age group in between, they were a **bunch of average** Aussies convinced that this man was the Christ once more in human flesh. **That his presence was the sign** of the coming end of the world and that **only in him was salvation**.

**I felt disturbed**, cross, and upset by that report, **yet he is** just one of many who have **claimed to be** Christ returned throughout the past 2,000 years and **Jesus Himself warned us** to expect such imposters.

**In the passage from Mark 13 Jesus says in v5–6**

***<sup>5</sup> Jesus said to them: "Watch out that no one deceives you. <sup>6</sup> Many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and will deceive many.***

and then again in v21–22

<sup>21</sup> **At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'Look, there he is!' do not believe it. <sup>22</sup> For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and miracles to deceive the elect—if that were possible.**

**But as well as warning us to 'Beware Pretenders',** Jesus also told us **how we would know** that they were pretenders.

**In Mark 13:26 He lets us know** that when He returns it **will not be** as a human being living again the life He once lived on earth. **That mission is completed.** That work has been done and does not need to be done again.

**But He will return as the Almighty One** in power and majesty and every eye will see Him. **Verse 26 says:**

***<sup>26</sup> "At that time men will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. <sup>27</sup> And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.***

**There are many other** verses that back that up and enlarge upon it including:- ***Revelation 1:7***

***<sup>7</sup> Look, he is coming with the clouds,  
and every eye will see him,  
even those who pierced him;  
and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him.  
So shall it be! Amen.***

**Now it is important that we have a knowledge** of these verses, for if a **friend asks** us what we think of that guy who claims to be Jesus we can point them to the words that Jesus spoke about His coming again in the Bible and **show how absolutely world changing** His return will be.

**But there is more at stake in** Mark chapter 13 **than just a warning** about those who pretend to be the Christ. **It also contains teaching** for Christians on **how we should live** in this age before His coming.

**Things that Jesus wants us to know beforehand**, so that we should not **be surprised** when certain things happen, and **neither be fearful** when things are said and predictions are made.

**So straight away we can see that Mark 13 is a vital chapter** for us to read and understand. But there's a problem. It's a really difficult chapter to get a grip of. **One writer says** of this chapter:-

***Welcome to the most complex and difficult chapter of Mark, one that causes even world-class scholars to toss up their hands and admit, "We can't tell for certain what Jesus means." It begins when four guys ask Jesus when the Temple will be destroyed. Jesus begins addressing them, but ends addressing everyone. His lecture seems to cover not only the Temple, but also the end of human history; the trick is in figuring out which of His sentences refer to which topic.*** (The Book of Mark, the Smart Guide to the Bible Series(2007) page 237)

***Have you ever had one of those conversations when you seem to be speaking about two things at once? You and the other person know what you are saying but if a third person happened to be listening in they would be really confused.***

**That's what we have here in Mark 13.**

**Jesus has just made a most startling prediction** about the most amazing building in Jerusalem—the Temple. **He said in Mark 13:2**

<sup>2</sup> ***"Do you see all these great buildings?" replied Jesus. "Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down."***

**Now the Jews then believed** that the Temple was the centre of the world and that its **destruction would end** this age.

**So in some trepidation Jesus' closest friends ask** Him privately **when** the Temple would be destroyed and **what signs** would precede the end of the age, **because** they believed that the two things would happen together.

**The corresponding passage in Matthew 24:3 makes their question very clear:-**

***"Tell us," they said, "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"***

**We know from history** that they were wrong in that belief **and Jesus** of course, knew that too.

**The Temple was destroyed** by the Romans in AD 70, about 30 to 40 years after the resurrection of Jesus. **The Lord's return and the end** of this age is still to come.

**So Jesus, treating them as two** different occasions, begins His answer to them by addressing the part of their question **that refers to the end** of the age, and by saying in v5 ***"Watch out that no one deceives you."***

**The disciples wanted to know the signs** that they should look for that would tell them that the end was close. **They wanted a timetable.** 'When this happens you know it's time to get ready for Jesus' return.'

**It's a human trait** to want to know that type of thing in advance.

**But what Jesus says is that there won't be those signs.**

In fact He states in v32.....<sup>32</sup> ***"No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. <sup>33</sup> Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come.***

**Yet Jesus knew that throughout the ages** there would be those deceivers **who would claim** that the end is about to happen because they see the signs.

**They will point to wars** as the sign. **To earthquakes** as the sign. To famines as the sign. **Some will think** they know more than Jesus and will even come up with an actual date. ***So Jesus says in v7***

***When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come.***

**In other words don't get into a tither** when people start pointing at this or that disaster as a sign that Jesus is on His way, **& don't** spend heaps of time trying to work things out so that you can come up with a poss date.

**In fact Jesus goes** on to say that these **terrible things and worst**, including persecution of believers **will happen** throughout the time between His resurrection and His return.

**He doesn't promise** Christians in this age of Grace **a rosy life** where everything will always be smooth for us. But the promise He does give in v13 is that **"he or she who stands firm to the end—and the word for end used here suggests the end of one's life or pilgrimage on earth—will be saved."** **The blessed** life for the believer is still to come and will come.

**Then, having dealt with** that part of the question, **he addresses** their first question **about when the Temple** would be destroyed and does so in **v14-23.**

**He begins** with a prophecy from the book of Daniel. ....Verse 14

***"When you see 'the abomination that causes desolation' standing where it does not belong—let the reader understand—then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.***

**Everyone seems to accept** that this refers to something or someone really horrible, set up as the **ultimate blasphemy** in the holy place of the Temple.

**Some see it** as something that is **still to happen** and connect it with the anti-Christ.

**I along with many others believe** however, that it **refers to a terrible** thing that took place in the Temple just before the Romans destroyed **Jerusalem in AD 70.**

**The Jewish Zealots had risen against** the Romans and had taken back Jerusalem for the Jews. **They used the Temple** as their fort and the Holy of Holies as just another room.

**They murdered** some of their prisoners of war in the Temple and set up a fake High Priest who make a mockery of the most holy place.

**A Jewish historian of that time,** Josephus tells us that the Christians saw this as the **sign that Jesus had spoken** of and they did what Jesus tells them to do in the verses that followed. **They fled for the hills**—not the hills of Judea, but beyond, to a little mountain town called **Pella.**

**It wasn't long after the Christians** had escaped that a Roman General named Titus marched thousands of centurions into Jerusalem and slaughtered the Jews that remained.

**It's no wonder that Jesus said in v23**

**So be on your guard; I have told you everything ahead of time.**

**Then in v24 Jesus talks again about the day of His return,** letting us know that His return will be **accompanied by darkness before** the Son of Man will come in the clouds in great power. **A glorious day of deliverance** for the believers who will be gathered from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.

**That Day will most certainly come.** It will be unexpected and absolutely glorious.

**But for now we must live in this world** where evil is so prevalent, and use well **whatever** opportunity God gives us to share His love with others.

**It may not be easy to live** where we live: **to work** where we work; to **care** and share with some that cross our paths or seem to be given to us.

**At times life may seem fraught** with difficulties and obstacles. **Jesus predicted** such times for believers. **But God not only cares** for us but has a purpose for us that fits us like a glove. **No one else** can do or be where God has put you.

**And consequently the thing Jesus tells us to do** again and again in this chapter is **to Watch**. ...**To guard against deception**; against evil; against attacks; against slipping away from Him.

**This is what makes the closing words** of Jesus in this chapter so **pertinent to His disciples** and to us this morning. 13:35-37 (The Message)

***So, stay at your post, watching. You have no idea when the homeowner is returning, whether evening, midnight, cockcrow, or morning. You don't want him showing up unannounced, with you asleep on the job. I say it to you, and I'm saying it to all: Stay at your post. Keep watch."***