

Current Events and the Return of Christ

by Alan Redpath

The Olivet message is a prophetic discourse by Jesus that outlines the program of world history, including the destruction of Jerusalem, the Gentile age, and the future judgment of the nations.

Duration: 40:36

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Matthew 23:37, Matthew 24:2, Matthew 24:6, Matthew 24:42, Mark 13:2, Mark 13:37

Topics: "Second Coming"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of watching and praying in relation to the work of God. He highlights that watching involves maintaining loyalty to Jesus Christ and having courage in the face of adversity. The preacher also emphasizes the need to pray for God's kingdom and glory. The sermon is based on the last verse of the thirteenth chapter of the Gospel of Mark, where Jesus instructs his disciples to watch.

Transcript

May we look to God a moment. We thank thee Lord for that word and for that comfort that comes to our hearts and for that assurance that thou dost give to us. Now speak Lord for thy servant heareth.

Speak just now some message to meet my need which thou only dost know. Speak now through thy holy word and make me see some wonderful truth thou hast to show to me for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Would you please open your New Testament at the gospel according to Mark and the 13th chapter and you will need your Bible to follow this morning. I hope you have it with you or you can have access to one as you listen by radio. The 13th chapter of the gospel of Mark and I've taken for a text from which to commence our message the last verse of this chapter.

What I say unto you I say unto all. Watch. The words of this text are the climax of our Lord's message to his disciples given under the very shadow of the cross on the slopes of Mount Olivet looking over the city of Jerusalem.

Whole volumes have been written upon this portion of scripture which is known of course as Christ's Olivet discourse. Many interpretations have been offered and many expositions written about it. I have but 30 minutes and my main concern in bringing this message is to relate what the Lord Jesus said to current events.

But to do this with any degree of authority we must consider our Lord's message as a whole in its setting and you will remember that it is recorded in all three of the synoptic gospels in Matthew and Mark and in Luke. And it is recorded in Matthew and Luke in some greater detail than it is in Mark. We shall be considering something of what Matthew has had to say, something of what Mark records and just one verse of what Luke records.

So you need your Bible. But my dear friend let me just ask you this morning in the first place to get into the background of this message by considering the anxiety of the disciples. This is our first point for consideration.

We shall never understand our Lord's message unless we get back into the spirit of these men. We must know what their question meant. Look at it in the opening verse of Mark chapter 13.

Master, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here. Verse 4. Tell us then when shall these things be and what shall be the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled. Why did these disciples draw the attention of our Lord to the stones of the temple at that moment? They'd often been there with him.

It was familiar ground. Well the answer surely is in reminding ourselves of what Jesus had just said. You find it in the 23rd chapter of Matthew and in the 37th verse.

Immediately prior to this Olivet message Jesus said, O Jerusalem, Jerusalem thou that killest the prophets and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together even as a hen gathereth together her chickens under her wings and ye would not behold your house is left unto you desolate. It was as though the disciples were asking him, how can such a magnificent place become desolate? But look at his answer in the second verse of Mark chapter 13. Seest thou these great buildings? There shall not be left one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down.

Nothing less likely than that seemed to happen but yet less than a generation it was all fulfilled. The occupation of Rome with freedom of religion granted to the Jew seemed to be a permanent condition but 40 years after this it ceased. And so four of these men sat down, Peter, James, John and Andrew with Jesus and asked him, tell us when shall these things be? What shall be the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled? Or as Matthew records it a little more clearly, verse 3 of chapter 24.

The disciples came to him privately saying, tell us when shall these things be? What shall be the sign of thy coming and of the end of the world? Notice that question my dear listener because surely in the form in which they asked it they considered that the destruction of the temple and the fulfillment of Christ's purpose and the end of the age were one and the same thing. Remember that Jesus had been puzzling these men, not deliberately, but they hadn't understood him for months. Ever since that great moment at Caesarea Philippi when Jesus said, what think ye of Christ? Know ye not that the Son of Man must suffer, must be rejected, must be killed and must rise again? Ever since then they had been absolutely out of harmony with our Lord.

They didn't understand what he was doing. Ever since he began speaking about a cross he left them far behind. They'd seen his entry into Jerusalem, its wonderful acclamation by the people, then they'd seen his conflict with the rulers, they'd listened to his scathing denunciation of Judaism, his sentence of doom upon Jerusalem and they were absolutely bewildered and somehow I cannot but believe it was a very silent little group of men that that day went out of the city just a few days before what we know as Good Friday and went down the hill and through the valley and up the slope on the other side and sat down

beside Mount Olivet overlooking Jerusalem and asked him this question, what did they mean? Of course all that they asked could only come about by our Lord's second advent but they didn't know a thing about the second advent.

His future return necessitated first the cross and then the resurrection but though he had spoken to them about these things they could never grasp the truth about the resurrection and they rejected the necessity for the cross. They were in revolt concerning Calvary and blind concerning a risen Savior. How could they possibly know a thing about his second coming? And so if we take this question as they asked it, they were simply saying this, tell us Master, tell us, if this temple is going to be destroyed and if you're coming to do it in judgment how is it going to happen? When is it going to happen? When is going to be the end? I wonder if there isn't a very real sense, beloved friend, in which you and I are in a position today just where they were.

Oh don't you long sometimes like I do just to get aside from it all for a little while to some lonely place. We'd have a long way to go for a mountain but a lakeside would do me nicely. And just go beside a lake and sit down and listen to Jesus talk to us as he talked to these men.

Because events today puzzle all of us. We don't understand them. If God is alive, if he's omnipotent, then then immediately we have to ask why? And if he says he's coming then we say when and how.

Is Christianity on the way out or is it on the way in? Is it finished or is it just commencing its greatest day? Is this civilization wrecked and ruined or is it going to usher in a new and a mighty day the like of which the world has never known? These are questions. Oh that I could sit down with Jesus today and just hear him talk to me about them. I've tried to do that and therefore I want to bring to you not simply the anxiety of the disciples and I believe that anxiety would be deeply rooted in your heart and mine in some way today.

But I will try to bring to you the answer of Jesus himself. The only possible explanation of this Olivet message is that it has two horizons. Do you ever, have you ever climbed up mountains? I love mountain climbing when it isn't too hot.

And when you can climb up and you see a peak and you say that's it. And you set up, set out and you get up to that peak and no sooner do you look over the top than you find you're only at the foothills. There's another great mountain further away and between them there's great valleys and deeps that you have to traverse to make the ultimate peak.

And it seems to me that this message of our Lord on Mount Olivet is just like that. There's a near horizon and there's a distant view. One of them only forty years beyond the time when he gave this message.

The other that is still future. One horizon that deals with the destruction of Jerusalem which took place in AD 70. The other which touches the end of this present age and which ushers in the coming of the King.

Glad day, glad day. Could it be the crowning day? That about which we've been singing. But the burden of this message is not so much the overthrow of a city as the end of human civilization without God.

It is the greatest unfolding of God's program for world history that has ever been written. And those who attack the authority of the Bible and particularly the authority of prophecy and ridicule it and say that prophecy is impossible are in great trouble with a passage of scripture like this. For if you deny its connection with the second advent because prophecy is an impossibility, then logically you must deny its connection with the downfall of Jerusalem.

For if you admit the possibility that Jesus prophesied something that would happen in the next generation, you must also admit the possibility that he prophesied something that would happen two millenniums ahead. And the only resource of the higher critic of scripture is to say that this passage was actually written after the destruction of Jerusalem and was simply an account of it. Isn't it amazing the lengths to which so-called human intelligence will go to undermine the authority of the Word of God? To take that position creates a problem that is absolutely insoluble.

For nobody, surely, who wrote of the event after it had taken place would have included, for example, the 26th verse of Mark 13 and the 25th verse speaking of stars of the heavens that shall fall and powers that shall be shaken and the coming of the Son of Man in great glory and in great power. Those things didn't happen then and they haven't happened yet. But as our Lord takes his disciples aside and unfolds the future, will you please notice how he begins in the fifth verse of Mark chapter 13, this is what he says, warning his disciples and says, take heed lest any man deceive you.

In other words, don't let anybody lead you astray. There have always been fanciful interpretations of this passage in order to fit it in with preconceived ideas of future events until we wander far from what the Scriptures say. I've no doubt you shall receive a lot of help from your Schofield Bible, but you will remember, won't you, that Schofield notes are not inspired.

Will you please notice, will you please notice that the Lord Jesus takes his disciples aside and warns them of this possibility of going astray. Glance a moment at the fuller account that's given by Matthew in chapter 24 and 25. I must ask you to look there first of all for a few minutes.

And will you please notice that he speaks in the first place in Matthew 24 and verse 2 of the destruction of the temple. Then in verse 6 he speaks of the end, the coming of the end of the age. Wars and rumors of wars, see that ye be not troubled, for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.

Now will you notice this important principle, beloved? Immediately the Lord answers these disciples' questions by separating in their minds his personal future return from the destruction of the city of Jerusalem. And in so doing it seems to me without getting into controversial issues, if I can avoid it, though it certainly will be difficult this morning, it seems to me that he unfolds his program of world history in three parts. I have no time to go into this in detail, but may I give this suggestion to you for your own study.

For in Matthew 24 verse 5 right through verse 36 you have our Lord's future program for the Jewish nation of Israel. The language of those verses, the reference to himself as the Christ, as the Son of Man, the whole projection of thought is there directed to this nation that has been rejected. But quite clearly in the 37th verse of Matthew 24 he begins to speak about something else, about the future of the Gentile world, about world conditions on a far wider scale than the Jewish nation itself.

And this runs right through both in story, in prophecy, in parable, till you come to the 30th verse of the 25th chapter, where the Lord again begins afresh with another aspect of the future. And the remainder of that 25th chapter he speaks of the future judgment of the nations of the world. I'm suggesting therefore that he takes the disciples far beyond their question.

And while the clouds are gathering round him, and he's walking towards the cross, and he knows that crucifixion awaits him, he looks quietly on and views the coming centuries from the standpoint of his ancient people Israel, from the standpoint of his new people, the church, the Gentile, and from the standpoint of the nations of the world. And so he looks right through the darkness into the light, right

through defeat into victory, right through the cross into the glory, and he spans all history in so doing. Now I don't wish you to think that I'm getting into some fanciful interpretation of this.

There are many arguments that I could introduce at our time to substantiate this approach to the Olivet message. Let me just give you quickly one of them. One title which our Lord loved to use concerning himself was the Son of Man.

The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which is lost. But this is a title which never suggested simply individual salvation. It suggested much more than this.

It meant everything that is lost socially, socially, administratively, nationally. The Son of Man has come to seek that which is lost, not simply the individual soul, but a prodigal world, that there might be a new world in which dwells righteousness. Our salvation, praise God, is personal, but it's much more than that.

In this message of the Olivet discourse, this title, the Son of Man, you will discover this as you read through your Bible these two chapters, is used only in the sections of his message which deal with the Jew and which deal with the future judgment of the nations of the world. It's only used in the sections of his message which have to do with government, with his own administration of the newest nation which had failed, and with his future administration of all the nations of the world under his authority. But in the section of this message which has to do with the Gentile, there is no reference to this title, the Son of Man.

It appears in the King James version, but it's omitted in the Revised, rightly. And have you ever noticed that the Lord Jesus is never referred to in the epistles as the Son of Man? In that portion of the New Testament which is particularly for the Gentile, particularly for the Church, you never hear of him referred to as the Son of Man. This is a title which dealt with the Jew in his submission and rejection, which deals with all the world in his future government of all nations, the Son of Man.

But you never find it in this Olivet discourse, in the section of it dealing with the Church. That's just one little argument for the basis of our approach. But now will you come back quickly with me to the gospel of Mark? Because you see, if we're to understand, and remember this is the gospel that we're particularly considering on these Sundays.

If we understand this chapter, unless you recognize what I've said, we'll go sadly astray. Because here we have no account in Mark's record. We have no account at all of the second and third sections of his message.

In other words, Mark says nothing about the Gentile age and he says nothing about the judgment of all nations. His message here is entirely that portion which has to do with Israel, with the rejected kingdom. Notice what he says about them in verses 5 through 8. He warns these disciples as he answers their questions.

He warns them of wars and rumors of wars. But these, he says, are not the end. They're only the beginning.

And then in verses 9 through 12, he gives them personal instructions as to their behavior in time of persecution. He assures them of the presence of his Holy Spirit. Whatsoever shall be given you, verse 11, in that hour that speak ye, for it is not ye that speak but the Holy Ghost, and so on.

And then in verses 14 through 23, he tells them exactly what would be fulfilled in the fall and destruction of the city of Jerusalem. Culminating in the 23rd verse, take ye heed, behold, I have foretold you all things. And up to this point, he has told them exactly what would happen and history records that it did actually happen.

But then, please notice something carefully. Verse 24 then says, but in those days after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars of heaven shall fall, and the powers that are in heaven shall be shaken. Now you're going to be in confusion if you don't recognize the principle about which I've been speaking.

For between verse 23 and verse 24, there's a great big long valley full of darkness. Sometimes the light shines into it, sometimes the shadows break through, but it's a great big long valley, and we're in it right now. For if you were to read this chapter as it stands, you would say to yourself that those days which are recorded in verse 24, then must immediately follow what took place in AD 70.

But here you've got two of these mountain peaks in history about which I've been speaking, and Luke's account of this makes it perfectly clear. I'm quoting from Luke 21 verse 24, which exactly fits into this message at this point, where Luke says, listen, as he describes the fall of Jerusalem, they shall fall by the edge of the sword and shall be led captive into all the nations, and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles until the time of the Gentiles be fulfilled. And then in verse 25, he resumes exactly the same record as Mark does in his 24th verse.

So you see, there's a little verse that Luke puts in to help us there, which covers a whole period of nearly 2,000 years, the times of the Gentiles. For Jerusalem today, the day in which we live, is still trodden down by Gentile power. It's still, as a country, as a country, though it is re-established in its land, it is still threatened by tremendous power around it.

It is still this, because the time of the Gentiles is not yet fulfilled. May I say in passing that one indication that the time is soon be fulfilled is that Jews are back there in their own land again today. But then in the closing part of this chapter, notice Mark goes on to speak of our Lord's personal return, and he ends with this word, this verse, and while I, what I say unto you, I say unto all, watch.

Now beloved, I've attempted to give you just the outline here, but I want to gather it together in our thoughts, so that we're not woolly about it, and we're not worried about it, and we're not weak about it in our interpretation of it. And there are one or two things that stand out, it seems to me, in the first place. He has made it abundantly clear that the period of history which must elapse between his cross and his return will be a time of turmoil and perpetual conflict.

Never did our Lord say that there would be a gradual ceasing of warfare and strife by the spreading of the gospel until all the world would have peace. He distinctly taught that the whole age until his return would be marked by conflict and bloodshed. Wars and rumors of wars are not in themselves, he says, the signs of the end.

One day we shall see these things which baffle us and perplex us beyond measure. We will see these things to be part of the process by which the wrath of man one day will be shown to have praised God, and the uttermost part of wrath he has restrained. For in every world confusion our God is upon the throne.

There's a crisis in Russia, there's a crisis in India, there's a crisis everywhere, but there's no crisis in heaven. Hallelujah! Our Lord God, omnipotent, reigneth. But will you also notice, please, that he utters solemn warning against false prophets and tells us that the stress of these days would in itself produce them.

Verse 22, false Christs, false prophets shall rise and shall sow signs and wonders to seduce, if it were possible, even the elect. Oh, how careful therefore I have to be and you have to be not to be moved from my loyalty to the Lord Jesus by voices that claim to be his but are not. And then he tells us in the 25th verse that the end of this age will be marked by supernatural signs.

The stars of heaven shall fall, the powers that are in heaven shall be shaken, and they shall see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. But he is careful, note, to tell us that the time of his return is unknown. Verse 32, of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.

Beloved, listen to me, there isn't a verse in the Bible which can help you or help me to fix within the limits of a human calendar the day on which Jesus shall come. Nothing can be plainer than the language of verse 33, take ye heed, watch and pray, for ye know not when the time is. The Lord deliver us from quarreling about a timetable.

God give us unity of vision and passion and burden for the personal coming of our Lord Jesus soon. But he will come very suddenly. This much he tells us.

Verse 36, lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. Matthew puts it quite graphically in his 24th chapter when he says, when the coming of the Son of Man shall be, verse 42, shall be in a field, one shall be taken the other left. That I presume is midday.

Verse 41, two women shall be grinding at the mill, the one shall be taken the other left. That shall be early in the morning. Verse 42, watch therefore, for ye know not, ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.

The whole story and the whole emphasis is the suddenness, the unexpectedness of his return. May I say to you that it is sometimes very difficult in this passage of Scripture to distinguish between what I have called the near horizon and the distant one. But I suggest to you, and I am not a Job's comforter, I would suggest to you that the world's greatest anguish is not history, but it is yet to come.

The coming of Antichrist, fulfilling the reference in Mark, verse 14, and of Daniel 9.27, the period of great tribulation, the coming of the Lord after that for his elect Israel, who will be restored and re-established to their land in accordance with the prophecies of Ezekiel 37 and 39. All these dramatic, world-shaking events are yet to be. And it is my personal conviction that the Lord Jesus will come in grace for his church before he comes in judgment to the earth.

What then is our responsibility in the light of these events, in light of the answer of our Lord, in the light of the anxiety of the disciple? What is our responsibility? And this must be our concluding thought. What I say unto you, I say unto all, watch. What does Jesus mean by that? Notice the frequent repetition of this word, watch, in the last verses of this chapter.

Actually, there are two Greek words used and translated by the same English word. Verse 33, watch and pray. Verse 35, watch ye therefore.

Verse 37, watch. The second word used in the last two instances is the positive one. It means, be on the alert, be wide awake.

If I could feel my way into that word, as it were, to understand what our Lord is getting at, it has a suggestion of the business house, the marketplace, keenness, alertness, readiness, initiative. Watch. So said Jesus to his disciples, and so he says to us, be watchful.

Not in the sense of climbing a mountain and sitting down there and waiting to be raptured into heaven, not that. But in the sense of being on the alert, down to earth, with your feet on the ground, your heart in heaven, raised in great expectation that he will come soon. He would send them to the uttermost parts of the earth, but they must be wide awake in their going.

Don't be led away by false prophets. Don't be alarmed by wars and rumors of wars. Watch, says Jesus.

Be on the alert. And this is the other word, watch and pray, and this is the negative word. It means, don't be asleep.

Don't be asleep. Don't go to sleep when you're praying. And I don't think that means don't simply sort of sit back and lapse into unconsciousness.

But it just means don't pray like most Christians do pray. Don't pray prayerlessly, without a burden. Don't say your prayers.

Don't get through like a kind of record. Don't just churn it out. Watch, watch the prayer of a man whose heart is burdened.

My soul, says the psalmist, my soul followeth hard after thee. That's how God wants his people to pray in days like these, with his coming so soon ahead of us. Watch.

Be prayerful. Be alert in your prayer life. Don't let it become mere humdrum dead.

Oh, watch eagerly. Be on the alert. Watching, therefore, beloved, is praying.

Watching, therefore, is working. And work and pray. Every man, notice this, every man his work, verse 34, every man to his work.

And work which is so thrilling when it's in relation to this great program of God. Watching is maintaining loyalty to Jesus Christ. Watching is courage that isn't troubled when things go wrong in the world and when warfare is all around us.

Watching is praying that's always seeking for his kingdom and for his glory. None of the things that are happening in this 20th century startle God or surprise him. They were all known to him long ago.

And what we are seeing, I believe, I believe with all my heart what we are seeing are the death thralls of one civilization and the birth pangs of another. And it won't be long before these things are fulfilled and this world civilization, man's superhuman attempt at running the world without God will crash and there will be ushered in a new civilization, a new kingdom wherein dwelleth righteousness and peace and glory shall cover the earth as the waters covers the sea. I'm so glad to be right in the day when we're witnessing death thralls and birth pangs, right there now.

And the final overthrow and downfall of every human ingenuity apart from God. What a little puppet. Some of these great fantastic machines and these great philosophies of life will seem to be on that day when they're brought low at the feet of our wonderful Lord Jesus.

May I conclude by one question. Our current events, signs of his return, can you interpret prophecy by history? Is it possible for us to know where we are in the unfolding of human history? Verse 28 of Mark 13 and verse 29 would lead me to say yes. Verse 32 to verse 37 would lead me to say no.

We are not entirely in the dark nor are we entirely in the light. We may know but we may not know. To deny that we may read the future by the present is to deny what Jesus says in verse 28 and 29.

When these things come know that it is nigh. On the other hand the dogmatic insistence that the door is even on the latch is to deny his warning of verse 33. No man knoweth.

But it certainly seems that the age in which we live is full of the signs which are going to introduce the end. And yet it remains true that we know not when the time is. My time has gone long ago.

I said goodbye to our radio audience about three minutes ago. I'm going to say goodbye to you in a minute. But I want to say something to you before I finish because this thing is not theory to me.

This is not kind of mere cold doctrine. This is life. This is part of me.

The thing that I've been preaching you today, the burden of my soul. What is my reaction? First, do I speak to some very super hyper intellectual individual listening to me this morning who views his Bible with grave suspicion? How do you feel now? Oh brother, if there's one thing this thing, this message tells me, it's this book is absolutely authoritative. It is the only authoritative word to which the human race may turn in this day of agony and distress.

Everything that our Lord said would happen has happened and is happening. Is there any other book in the world that can do that? Is there any other one save Jesus who could tell us about it? Therefore I say to you, take heed. Take heed how you regard your Bible.

May you not submit it to your criticism, but may you be submitted in your soul to its own criticism. Take heed. Watch.

Be on the alert. You can't afford to be a passenger in the king's army. You can't afford to be out of work.

There's no unemployment. There's no recession in the service of the king of kings, in the business of the master. Why no trades at full boost? And there's a great need for everybody to be in on.

You can't afford to sit back in days like these. Watch and pray. And don't be sleepy and unintelligent in your praying.

Be light, right at work in your prayer, wide awake in your prayer, burdened heart with a recognition that you're living in days like these. And work. Work.

What can I do? Too many people at Moody Church. I can't work here. Can't you? Work.

All right then. Go back home. Lift your telephone.

Call your next-door neighbor. Bring them to church tonight. Go across the street and witness to your friend about Jesus.

Tell them that Jesus is your Lord and your master and that he's coming soon. Work. Get a tract from the information desk.

Take it and give it to somebody and speak a word of bringing back the king. Work. Go to it, every one of us, in the name of the Lord, because soon the day of opportunity will be over.

And he who is at the door will have opened it and ushered in his own and then closed the door. And it'll be too late. So glad I'm alive in a day like this, aren't you? So glad our God is on the throne.

So glad he's coming back soon. I'm so glad I'm saved. Hallelujah.

May you be saved too. May you know the joy of the Lord in your heart. And if anyone today has listened to this message and just don't know a thing about it and what we're talking about, and it seems double-dutch, my friend, I, I remind you that this same Lord Jesus said, if any man, him that cometh unto me, he would in no wise cast out.

And he's able to receive you, take him, take you to himself this day, and he's able to come and live in your life and give you his joy and forgiving grace. Shall we bow together in prayer? Oh Father, may these things live in our hearts. May we, may we just live in the light of this great fact that our God is on the throne and our Savior's coming back.

Lord, grant that we may not be idle, but may we go to work for thee. May we live for thee day by day. May our lives glorify thee.

May we be watchful and may we be careful lest we be deluded and taken aside by voices which are not voices from heaven. Speak to us, thy people, and speak to those who are not thy people. And may this day see fruit for thy glory.

For Jesus' sake we ask it. Amen.

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