



Sermon Title: When the World is Falling Apart

Mark 13

Speaker: Scott Dudley

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Well, great to see all of you. Those of you who are joining us online, those of you who are here in the room, thank you for joining us. I love being led in worship by our students. It's just so great. And Ashley, thank you so much for that testimony. That was just awesome. The scripture I'll get to in a minute, it's in Mark 13, but before I do that, I just want to ask a question, make a statement. Does it seem to you, I'm guessing that the answer is yes, that the world is not in good shape right now? Does it kind of feel like things are spinning out of control? We've got wars, Ukraine, Israel, Gaza, we've got fears around the economy. We've got a lot of fear around the election. Divisions in our culture that we haven't seen since the sixties, not to mention whatever may be going on in our personal lives with the health or school or career or financial or family challenges that we may be facing.

So I just want a quick show of hands. That long list there. How many of you never worry about any of those things? Wow, what a bunch of worriers. Oh no, there's a hand over there. There was one other hand in this room and I knew it would go up. It's my wife's. My wife is genetically incapable of worry. Do you know how frustrating that is for me? Because I'm a worrier and I'm always like, "You need to worry about this thing that I'm worried about because if you worry about it somehow that'll make it all better." So other than my wife, the rest of you are worried and my wife is sitting next to someone who worries. She's married to someone who worries. So you can listen to that, this sermon for the sake of those people in your life who worry. We are as a church reading through the book of Mark together as a church.

And this week, one of the chapters we read was chapter 13, where Jesus makes a long speech meant to comfort his disciples about a world that is spinning out of control. And he says this. "When you hear of wars and rumors of wars..." We have wars? Do we have rumors of wars? "Do not be alarmed." Easier said than done. "Such things must

happen. Nation will rise against nation. There will be earthquakes in various places and famines. These are the beginnings of the birth pains. You'll be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. Whenever you are arrested," when not if, "and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given to you at the time, for it's not you speaking, it's the Holy Spirit. Brother will betray brother to death, and a father, his child, children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death."

Talk about social divisions. Is this passage making you feel any better yet, by the way?
No.

Exactly right. "But the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. At that time, if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Messiah,' or, 'Look, there he is', don't believe it, for false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and wonders to deceive if possible, even the elect. So be on your guard. At that time, people will see the son of man coming in clouds with great power and glory, but about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven nor the son, but only the father." Nobody knows when Jesus is coming again. But that has not stopped lots and lots of people from speculating and even naming days, the day when Jesus will come back again, lots of speculation about it.

I always think that takes a lot ofchutzpah. Not even Jesus knows when he is coming back, at least on earth, he didn't know. So why do other people think that they know more than Jesus? And I hear people say sometimes a lot, "These have got to be the end times. Look at all these signs. Jesus is coming soon." I hope so. I certainly hope so, because everything would get better if Jesus came back, from the big things in our lives to even the little small things in our lives. Sometimes on a Saturday night when I feel like the sermon isn't very good, sometimes I will think, "Jesus, if you came back tonight, I wouldn't have to preach this sermon. Just saying. Now would be a great time, Jesus. What are you waiting for?" This passage is a genre of literature known as apocalyptic literature, which just means it's about the end times. And Christians who suffer, the poor, the oppressed, the persecuted, Christians who suffer know how to interpret Apocalyptic literature about the end times.

And Christians who are comfortable play with it, speculate about it, write books, whole book series, make movies about it. But the main point of apocalyptic literature is not so much when Jesus is coming back and what that's all going to be like. The main point is he is coming back, and it's meant to comfort Christians and give them courage and hope, especially when they're facing a world that's spinning out of control, which is why Jesus says, "Be on your guard. Be alert," because you don't know when that time's going to come. It's like a man going away. He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge and tells the one at the door to keep watch. Therefore, keep watch because you don't

know when the owner of the house will come back. So be ready. And this passage shows us how to have courage and hope in a couple of ways.

First, when the world seems to be falling apart, either our personal life or the world seems to be falling apart, avoid false messiahs. Jesus says, "Hey, there's going to be false messiahs. Avoid them." And that means literally people who say they're Jesus returned, like cult leaders sometimes say that they're Jesus. It means literally that. But Jesus is clear in this text that when he comes back again, he's not going to slip in quietly like he did the first time coming as baby. He says, "People will see the son of man coming in clouds with great power and glory." In other words, you can't miss it when it happens. But false messiahs are not just people claiming to be Jesus. They're all kinds of false messiahs that we turn to for a sense of security and courage and comfort. Money can be a false messiah if we think it's kind of our ultimate salvation. Status and education.

But perhaps the biggest one right now for a lot of people is politics. We have to elect the "right people" because they're going to help us. They're going to save us. Now, things like money, education, all of those things, those are good things. They're not bad things. They're good things, but they aren't our ultimate hope. They aren't our ultimate salvation. And elections matter because elections have consequences, and we need to take them seriously. But I put no hope in Democrats. I put no hope in Republicans to be our ultimate savior because Jesus is. Now, the pushback on that is often, yeah, yeah, yeah. I know that of course Jesus is our ultimate hope, but in the meantime, things here on earth before he comes back could get really difficult if we elect "the wrong people". And just who the right and wrong people are of course depends on who you're talking to.

And yeah, that's true. Things on earth can get pretty ugly. In fact, that's kind of what Jesus is saying. Things are going to get really bad. They're going to get really, really bad. But don't run to a false messiah because our hope, and this is the second point, when the world is out of control, you got to remember that Jesus is Lord and nothing else is. Jesus is in control working to bring good out of hard and difficult circumstances, and he's our ultimate hope. The beginning of this text says, "As Jesus was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said, 'Look, teacher. What massive stones, what magnificent buildings,'" talking about the temple.

"Do you see all these great buildings?" replied Jesus. "Not one stone here will be left on another. Everyone will be thrown down," which is a prediction that came true a couple of decades later when the Romans destroyed the temple in 70 A.D. And then it says, "As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John and Andrew asked him privately, 'Tell us when all these things are going to happen.'" Where Jesus gives this speech really, really matters.

He's on the Mount of Olives and he's looking at the temple which would've looked something like this. This is Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives. And that gold dome there that you see is the Dome of the Rock. It's a Muslim holy site that was built 600 years after Jesus. It's also where the temple once was located. So in Jesus' day where you see that golden dome, they would've seen the temple. And the temple was the center, not just of the religious life. It was also where their political leaders met. So the temple was also the center of their political life. And Jesus is looking at it when he gives this long speech. And his point is, "See that center of religious and political life? It looks really impressive. It looks really powerful, but it's not Lord, and it's not going to last. It's a false messiah."

Donald Trump is not Lord. Kamala Harris is not Lord. Money isn't Lord. Reputation isn't Lord. Those things may have temporary power here on Earth, but they are not Lord and they can't do what only Jesus can do, which is to take all the chaos of this world and the chaos in our lives and compel it to yield up ultimate good. Only Jesus can do that. See, there is a physics of grace at work in our world. The Apostle Paul says, "Where sin increased, the grace of God increased all the more. Where bad things increased, God's good things increase all the more." In this text, Jesus says, "Whenever you're arrested and brought to trial, don't worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given to you at the time. It's not you speaking, it's the Holy Spirit." In other words, in difficult times, God's going to give you what you need to thrive even in those hard times.

There's a physics of grace at work in our world and in our lives. As difficulties increase, the power of Jesus in our lives increases all the more if we stick close to him. Jesus says, "When the world seems to be coming apart, when it seems to be coming undone, remember this. These are the beginnings of the birth pains." And birth pains is an interesting metaphor for Jesus to use because birth pains are no fun. So I've been told. Three times in particular I've been told. But they're the prelude to new life. And that's the comfort and the courage and the hope that Jesus is getting at in this passage. When things seem to be spinning out of control, Jesus is Lord and he is always there to make sure that the result of these hard things is going to be new life.

When chaos increases, God's redemption increases all the more. Where fear increases, the courage of Jesus is more available. Where suffering increases, the presence of Jesus becomes that much more real. When all hell is breaking loose, it means heaven is close at hand in history and in our lives as well, because God is working behind the scenes in unseen ways to make sure his kingdom comes through all the hard stuff and bring good out of bad circumstances. When Jesus returns for sure, but not just then, right here and right now, even in our circumstances. It doesn't mean our circumstances are going to be easy. They may be very hard, but Jesus will give us the power to rise above those circumstances and thrive in spite of them. Now, you may be thinking to yourself, "That just feels like kind of a consolation prize." Right? Like, kind of second best.

Your life sucks, but Jesus is with you. Yay. But I don't think it is just a consolation prize. And I'll say why in a minute. I think it's deeper than that. Because Jesus is Lord, there's a physics of grace at work in our world and in our lives, which is why Jesus says, "The one who stands firm to the end will be saved." Not just for heaven someday, but also saved in this world, not necessarily from our circumstances, but the power to rise above them. It'll be all right in the end, and if it is not all right, it means it is not yet the end. That's Jesus' promise, and it's also the action step for this week. The action step for this week, when things in the world or in our lives are spinning out of control, stand firm. And that means at least three things.

In the original Greek of this passage, the word used for stand firm is *hupomeno*. It's an active, not a passive word. In other words, we don't just wait around for Jesus to come back and fix everything and make it better. Sometimes you get the sense of that from some preachers. We don't just sit around and wait for Jesus to come back and fix it. No, no, this is an active word. It's not passive. It was often used in a military context and it meant to hold your ground and to push back on the enemy. So the first thing stand firm means when Jesus says stand firm is work with Jesus to bring his kingdom. See, there's an implied accountability in this text to not just wait around until Jesus comes back to fix everything because stand firm is active. So it means we work against the powers of evil and chaos and despair to bring Jesus' kingdom here and now on earth as it is in heaven.

Heal divisions, empower the poor, comfort the mourning and the distressed. We do that as individuals with people that we know. We do that collectively as a church. And I think we're called to do that as a nation, because the US sometimes does enormous good in the world, but sometimes the US does things that make other countries feel like the world is spinning out of control. So this week, how can you stand firm by partnering with Jesus to bring his kingdom wherever you live, work, play or learn? The second thing stand firm means is be ready. That's what Jesus means at the very end of this passage when he says it's like an owner of a house who's left his servants in charge. He says, "Therefore, keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back." Be ready to face whatever is coming your way, in the world or in our personal lives.

Be ready. Back in 2012, when our kids were still in elementary school, we took them on an East Coast trip. And some of you have heard me talk before about how when we were in New York, Hurricane Sandy came through and it knocked out power and water over most of the city. All flights were grounded, couldn't get out, which my kids thought was kind of a bit of an adventure. My son had a really good time bugging his little sister saying things like, "Maybe we'll run out of food and we'll have to eat Lucy." So he really had fun with that. But my wife and I didn't experience it as so much of an adventure because we had three kids stuck in a dark hotel without power or water. We had to walk over a mile to Times Square where there was power and water, find an open restaurant, which was not easy to do, buy something to eat just so that we could use the bathroom.

And I thought, "Man, having to walk over a mile, three kids just to go to the bathroom, this just isn't very good." So I found a store that was open, miraculously, and I just bought a bunch of bottled water figuring that we could pour that into the tank so that we could flush the toilet. But when I brought it all back to our darkened hotel, my wife was reading the label and it was some kind of fancy French water that had never been touched by human hands or something like that. My wife said, "We can't use this to flush the toilet. It's too expensive." And my son said, "Ooh, ooh, Dad, you can use this in a sermon. It's like Jesus in the Bible. He's really good, but then we flush him down the toilet."

Such a helpful child supplying sermon illustrations for his father. But here's the thing, we knew the storm was coming. It was all over the news that the storm was coming and we prepared a little bit. We bought some food, but we didn't think about water. Because if we'd thought about water, we would've filled the bathtub before the storm and had all the water we needed. But when the storm comes, it is too late to prepare for the storm. You got to do that before the storm comes. You have to be ready. And the way we get ready is the third meaning of stand firm, and that is to connect with Jesus. Again, in the Greek, the word there is *hupomeno*, and one of the translations for that word *meno* is to stand firm or hold your ground. But another meaning of it is to connect with or to abide in or to remain in something.

It's the same word Jesus uses when he says remain in the Greek, *meno*. Same word is stand firm. Remain in me, as I remain, *meno*, in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself. It must remain in the vine. I am the vine. You are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you'll bear much fruit. In order to stand firm and be ready for whatever comes our way, we need to remain, connect, abide in Jesus. That's one of the reasons we're reading through the book of Mark together as a church this summer, because scripture is one of the ways we connect with Jesus. It's why worship matters, because it helps us get ready and prepare for whatever storm may be coming. That's why it's important to serve in the ways that Jesus tells us to serve, help the poor or comfort someone in mourning or resettle refugees because those things force us to rely on Jesus, which helps us practice relying on Jesus for when the storm comes.

We'll be ready. We know how to rely on him. Get ready. Scripture, prayer, community, service are the spiritual equivalents of filling the bathtub before the storm. I was talking to a friend recently whose marriage is falling apart and he's done everything he can think of to heal it and nothing is working and it's really painful for him. He's also worried about the impact on his kids, but he also said, "I have never been closer to Jesus in my life, and my prayer life now is entirely different."

He said, "I don't always ask Jesus to fix my marriage. Sometimes I do, but mostly my prayers have gone a lot deeper than that. It's like I'm with him all day. I know he's there when I go running, when I'm in a meeting, I know he's there. And knowing that has given me the grace and the courage to get through this thing. And all the good theological

things I knew in my head, even told to other people I am now, they have now become not just head knowledge, they're now a lived experience for me. It doesn't take the pain away, but it's giving me a courage and it's giving me a hope that is more sturdy and it's stronger because my hope is not in my marriage or my job or my circumstances. It's in Jesus."

His world is spinning out of control. But in God's physics of grace where terrible circumstances increased, the presence and the power and hope of Jesus is increasing all the more. And that's not an accident in his case. He has followed Jesus his whole life, practiced prayer and scripture and service and community. So when the trial came, he was ready for it. Now again, you may say, "Well, that's just a consolation prize." Is it? Is it? I mean, my friend hates what's happening to him. It's no fun at all. But he is gaining something irreplaceable.

The ability to have hope and courage even when the world is coming apart at the seams, and nothing can take that away. And he is no fool who exchanges that which he cannot keep for that which he cannot lose. And what's true for him in his personal life is true for us in our personal life, but also in our corporate life as we look at a world that seems to be just flying apart at the seams. Marriages can break up, career can end suddenly, money can evaporate. Health can be taken away. Politicians will for sure disappoint us. But the courage that comes from only Jesus, that can never be taken away. Our lives and our world are not spinning out of control. Jesus is Lord, and he's at work in ways we see and that we don't see to bring about his good purposes in you, through you and all around you so that we can stand firm no matter what comes our way.

Because in Jesus, we are indestructible. So Jesus, help us to know that you're Lord. That you command all these things. That you are at work, even when we don't see it. In our lives, in our world, when things seem to be spinning out of control, Jesus, we know that you can give us indestructible courage and hope. So help us to do that. Help us to know you are Lord in a way that shows others in an anxious fretful world, in a way that gives us peace that we can then pass on to other people. Remind us, Jesus. The waves and winds still know your voice, who ruled them while you do up below. In your name, Amen.

Discussion Questions:

Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.

Opening Question: Looking back to last week's sermon and scripture... How did you live differently or practice what we talked about in your life this week? What did you do and how did it go?

Scripture Reflection Questions: Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

Sermon Reflection Questions: Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- Why do you think Jesus used the discussion about the temple to begin his discourse about the end times? What would the temple's destruction symbolize for them?
- What are the various warnings Jesus gives his followers in this text?
- What comfort does he offer? What comfort do you find in this text?
- What does it mean for you to keep watch and be ready?

Closing Question and Application: Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

Closing group prayer: Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.