

Mark 12:28-13:37

Last week we covered:

- Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem – allowing Himself to be recognized as the Messiah.
- Him cursing a fig tree as a symbol of the Nation of Israel's punishment for not being fruitful.
- His cleansing the temple.
- Speaking to the importance of forgiving others.
- The parable of the wicked vinedressers – foreshadowing His upcoming death
- The Pharisees asking Him if it's lawful to pay taxes to Caesar?
- The Sadducees trying to trip Him up regarding the truth of the resurrection.

²⁸ Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that He had answered them well, asked Him, “Which is the first commandment of all?” ²⁹ Jesus answered him, “The first of all the commandments *is*: ‘Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one.

Picking up from last week's conversation with Jesus and the Sadducees regarding the resurrection, there was at least one scribe who was listening to this exchange. He was impressed with the LORD's response to them, so He asks Jesus which is the first commandment of all. Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6:4 by saying the LORD is one. This verse was known to the Jews as the Shema, and they would repeat it out loud several times a day. The interesting component of this verse is the Hebrew word for “one” is “*echad*.” The interpretation of this word, by many scholars, is that this “one” is a compound unity – or plurality. In other words, the Hebrew word for one is revealing that while the LORD is one, His oneness consists of more than one component.

Specifically, many scholars see this word as a revelation of the Holy Trinity – the Father, Son, and Spirit. They are three separate entities, but together, they comprise one Being. I heard one pastor wisely say to not waste your time trying to figure out the Trinity – you'll never get there. Just accept it and move on. I will heed his advice and continue with this interchange.

³⁰ And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This *is* the first commandment. ³¹ And the second, like *it*, *is* this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

One of the countless reasons I love Jesus is He makes things simple. Here, He's taken the Ten Commandments and consolidated them down to two. The first is to love God completely. Our sin nature struggles with this commandment for two reasons. First, our sin nature is focused on loving ourselves, so why would we make a commitment to completely love God? The second reason is because to love God, we have to know Him. We can't know Him without first admitting our sins, which are linked to our sin-nature's preference for self-love.

Since this is true, we cannot get to the second commandment – to love others – until we first love God, receive His forgiveness, and then Him implementing the reprogramming of our hearts and minds to learn how to love as He does. If we're still focused on loving ourselves – serving our flesh, there is no room to truly love others. By making the choice to choose God's love for us over our own self-love, we are committing to trust in His far better love for us. This is what makes Him our Lord. As we grow more secure in His love, that frees us to share that sacrificial love with others. The key common word in these two commandments is “love.”

³² So the scribe said to Him, “Well *said*, Teacher. You have spoken the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but He. ³³ And to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt

offerings and sacrifices.”³⁴ Now when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, He said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” But after that no one dared question Him.

The scribe likes what Jesus said, and He repeats it – that’s always a good practice to remember what someone has told you. By saying it out loud, you’re confirming with both the other person *and* you that what’s been said is something you believe to be true. This would be the last question anyone would ask the LORD. He had won every challenge. They couldn’t trip Him up, so they only had one more card to play – to kill Him.

Jesus knows this, but here we see Him still ministering. The LORD encourages the scribe that he’s heading in the right direction with his understanding of what Jesus said – that he’s not far from the kingdom of God. What’s going to bring him to the kingdom of God? Confession that Jesus is God, and belief in what He’s about to do at the cross is the only way to get the key that unlocks the door into the kingdom. Keep this in mind as we hear these next verses.

³⁵ Then Jesus answered and said, while He taught in the temple, “How *is it* that the scribes say that the Christ is the Son of David? ³⁶ For David himself said by the Holy Spirit: ‘The LORD said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool.”’ ³⁷ Therefore David himself calls Him ‘Lord’; how is He *then* his Son?” And the common people heard Him gladly.

Jesus turns the tables on those who have been asking Him questions and asks them how King David can call his son his lord? Jon Courson laid this out nicely... The only way a son could be greater than his father was if he was more than simply the son of the father. The Jews knew the Messiah would come through the line of David, but they did not understand that the Messiah would be the Son of God. This is what Jesus is trying to get through to the people.

³⁸ Then He said to them in His teaching, “Beware of the scribes, who desire to go around in long robes, *love* greetings in the marketplaces, ³⁹ the best seats in the synagogues, and the best places at feasts, ⁴⁰ who devour widows’ houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation.”

The LORD returns to His attacking the religious leaders and warning the people of their hypocrisy and hurtful tactics. He’s singling out the scribes and how they walk around prideful in their robes, relishing in the respectful greetings, and always seeking the most prominent seats. They’re supposed to be so respected because of their knowledge of the Scriptures, but that knowledge did not transform their hearts. They would swindle widows for their benefit. Jesus makes it clear they are putting their eternal destination in real peril.

The Apostle Paul – once a Jewish religious leader himself, allowed the Holy Spirit to take his deep scriptural knowledge and humble his heart. He concluded in Galatians 1:10, “*For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ.*” Matthew West, one of my favorite contemporary Christian musicians has a great line in his song, “Unashamed,” that speaks to the correct mindset of a follower of Jesus Christ, “*I don’t answer to the crowd. I answer to the King.*”

⁴¹ Now Jesus sat opposite the treasury and saw how the people put money into the treasury. And many *who were* rich put in much. ⁴² Then one poor widow came and threw in two mites, which make a quadrans. ⁴³ So He called His disciples to *Himself* and said to them, “Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury; ⁴⁴ for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood.”

A mite in those days was worth 1/128th of a denarius. A denarius was the equivalent of a day's wage. So, we have not only a poor woman, but also a widow putting in two mites. Compared to the other people's giving, this was nothing. However, Jesus points out it's not the amount of money she gave that moved Him. It was her devotion towards the LORD by giving what was a far greater percentage of what she had, compared to the rich people. What's our lesson in this short scene? Giving to the Lord, whether it be money, time, or our abilities, is not to be measured by how much we give, but how much it costs us.

Jesus is within 48-72 hours of His betrayal, scourging, and crucifixion. The disciples are likely sensing the change in His countenance, so as we head into Chapter 13, they attempt to point out something good – the near finished rebuilding of the temple. Some scholars believe this temple would be worth at least a trillion dollars in today's money. Many people believe this was the greatest building ever constructed.

¹ Then as He went out of the temple, one of His disciples said to Him, "Teacher, see what manner of stones and what buildings *are here!*" ² And Jesus answered and said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not *one* stone shall be left upon another, that shall not be thrown down."

Jesus' response was, no doubt, very difficult to accept. To give you a taste of the magnitude of this building, according to the Jewish historian, Josephus, the stone segments of the building wall could be as long as 48' wide, 8' high, and 10' thick. I've read estimates that each stone weighed over 200 tons. Furthermore, these blocks were so perfectly hewn, when they were set upon each other, you could not put a knife blade between the blocks. Mortar was not even required. I could give you more detail, but I hope you get enough of a picture of how hard it would be to hear Jesus' claim not one stone should be left upon another.

Yet, the Roman General Titus, in 70 A.D. (some 40 years after Jesus' prediction) conquered Jerusalem. The final hiding place and point of defense for the Jews was the temple. One more piece of detail about the building – there was a pure gold dome at the top. Against Titus' orders, some of the soldiers shot flaming arrows into the temple setting it on fire. The fire was so intense that it both incinerated the people and melted the gold from the dome. The gold dripped down and covered the walls of the temple. The Roman soldiers looted and razed the temple and fulfilled Jesus' prophecy of not leaving one stone upon another.

Now we're going to spend the rest of the chapter and this time together going over what is called Jesus' Olivette Discourse. It's called Olivette because it was a teaching given on the Mount of Olives. The subject of the teaching? The end times for humanity.

³ Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked Him privately, ⁴ "Tell us, when will these things be? And what *will be* the sign when all these things will be fulfilled?" ⁵ And Jesus, answering them, began to say: "Take heed that no one deceives you. ⁶ For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am *He*,' and will deceive many."

No doubt being rattled by Jesus' prophecy about the temple, some of the disciples ask the LORD when will all this happen and what will be the sign when all this is fulfilled? Notably, from Matthew's version of this teaching, one of the questions asked is "what will be the sign of Your coming at the end of the age?" I think it's important that we understand the first words in Jesus' response is to take heed that no one deceives them.

This is not the only time the Bible warns about deceitful people claiming to be the Messiah or the true prophet of God. Over the centuries, there have been deceitful and/or delusional men who have claimed to be the Messiah. Every one of them came promising deliverance, but not one of them was Jesus. We're going to read about the greatest deceiver of all as we get further into the discourse.

⁷ But when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be troubled; for *such things* must happen, but the end *is* not yet. ⁸ For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be

earthquakes in various places, and there will be famines and troubles. These *are* the beginnings of sorrows.

Jesus begins to describe things that will come to be leading up to a 7-year period known as the Tribulation. The purpose of the Tribulation is two-fold. First, it is a period where God is going to pour out His wrath on a Christ-rejecting world. Secondly, it will be a time where God reconciles the Jewish people back to Himself. This seven-year period was prophesied by Daniel in chapter 9 in his book.

As we read these events that Jesus is speaking to, I would imagine you may be thinking that we're seeing many of these things happen before our eyes. However, in hopes of allowing you to listen to the rest of this teaching with more peace, I want share with you some Scriptures and thoughts regarding an important event that will take place. The Apostle Paul spoke of an event that, I believe, is going to happen sooner than others. Pulling from both 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and 1 Corinthians 15:51-53, Paul describes this event where suddenly – like a twinkling of an eye - the church will be caught up together in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Our earthly bodies will become our glorified bodies.

The Latin word for the phrase “caught up” is “raptos,” which is where we get the word rapture. There is much debate over the timing of when the rapture will take place. The three primary positions are that it will occur just before the Tribulation starts; half-way through the Tribulation, and at the very end of the seven years. To be completely candid, the Bible is not crystal clear on when the Rapture will take place. There are Scriptures that each camp uses that support their argument, but there are other Scriptures that create problems that lead to the lack of certainty as to which camp is right. Tragically, some churches have split apart due to a disagreement over the timing of the Rapture. That's just stupid. While the rapture is an exciting topic for many, given it has nothing to do with the truth of who Jesus is and what He did for us, any disagreement outside that truth should not warrant a church split.

I've done a lot of work researching this topic, and I'm quite confident that the Rapture will happen just before the Tribulation starts. In fact, I believe the Rapture will be the event that kicks off the Tribulation. I won't bore you with all the verses that support what is often called the “Pre-Tribulation” or “Pre-Trib” position. However, I do want to share two key Scriptures that, in my opinion, support this position.

2 Thessalonians 2:7b, “He who now restrains *will do so* until He is taken out of the way.” The “He” is, I believe, the Holy Spirit. If the church is still here, then the Holy Spirit must also be here. If He is taken out of the way, then the church must not be here. What I believe is preventing the Tribulation from commencing is the presence of the church. The Tribulation will exhibit unprecedented lawlessness, so while the church that represents a holiness and righteousness is here, it's restraining lawlessness.

The second verse I point out to support a pre-trib Rapture is 1 Thessalonians 5:9, “For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.” As I mentioned earlier, one of the two primary purposes of the Tribulation is for God to pour out His wrath on a Christ rejecting world. The church has accepted Jesus, so they do not qualify as being eligible to receive this wrath.

Also, you hopefully remember a few chapters ago the scene where James and John asked Jesus if they could sit on both His sides in His kingdom. Jesus asked them if they could drink the cup that He is going to drink. That cup was the Father's wrath on all sin. Therefore, if Jesus drank the cup of the Father's wrath on all sin, and we are forgiven by our faith in Jesus' sacrifice, I don't believe we can be here during the Tribulation while God is pouring out His wrath.

One last point, and I'll move forward. The Tribulation was called by Jeremiah as “Jacob's trouble.” Jacob was synonymous with the Nation of Israel. Therefore, the Tribulation does not concern the church.

⁹ “But watch out for yourselves, for they will deliver you up to councils, and you will be beaten in the synagogues. You will be brought before rulers and kings for My sake, for a testimony to them.

¹⁰ And the gospel must first be preached to all the nations. ¹¹ But when they arrest *you* and deliver you up, do not worry beforehand, or premeditate what you will speak. But whatever is given you in that hour, speak that; for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit.

Jesus is prophesying that the disciples are going to be persecuted by the Jewish leaders. They will be brought before rulers and kings for His sake, and they were. Church tradition tells us that the Apostle Paul even met Caesar Nero. The LORD informs them not to worry about what they're going to say to their detractors. The Holy Spirit will give them the words. In the book of Acts, Steven gave a remarkable and convicting sermon to his detractors that, I believe, was 100% given to him by the leading of the Holy Spirit. I say this because Acts 6:15 described his face as the face of an angel.

Verse 10 – that the gospel must first be preached to all the nations – is a stumbling block for some people regarding the timing of the Rapture. It shouldn't be. Remember, Jesus is talking about the end times. He's talking about His second return. As another proof of God's fairness, the gospel does first need to be preached before He returns – giving every human being the ability to choose God. This will happen via two primary methods. The LORD is going to preserve a 144,000 Jews as a remnant, and they will be fruitful – sharing God's Word. From Revelation 14, we read of a second method of delivering the gospel, "Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people."

¹² Now brother will betray brother to death, and a father *his* child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. ¹³ And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end shall be saved.

Jesus said in Matthew 10:34-36, "*Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to 'set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law'; and 'a man's enemies will be those of his own household.'*" From our reading, Jesus is echoing His words in Matthew. For some of us, our decision to follow Christ is an emotional and/or mental death sentence to our family and friends. During the tribulation, those who choose Jesus will be physically killed by their family. Thankfully, the Lord does offer hope for those who hold onto their faith through their persecutions – they shall be saved.

¹⁴ "So, when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it ought not" (let the reader understand), "then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. ¹⁵ Let him who is on the housetop not go down into the house, nor enter to take anything out of his house. ¹⁶ And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes. ¹⁷ But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! ¹⁸ And pray that your flight may not be in winter.

I mentioned earlier the greatest deceiver of all. A character known as the anti-Christ is going to emerge during the Tribulation. He will be part of the unholy trinity – Satan, him, and another character found in the book of Revelation known as the Beast. He will become a world leader – likely very charismatic. He'll perform signs and wonders and even bring a temporary peace in the Middle East with Israel and the Arab countries. As a result of that peace, the Jews will be allowed to reconstruct their temple.

As I understand it, the first half of the Tribulation will possibly not be that much worse than what we're experiencing now. However, with the church out of the way, morality will no doubt go into a tailspin. Furthermore, there will be a moment where God says, "That's enough." Half-way into the Tribulation – 3 ½ years, the anti-Christ will put an end to temple sacrifices that the Jews have reinstituted, go into the temple, and demand to be worshipped as god. This is what Daniel prophesied. Jesus is alluding to this, and He calls it the abomination of desolation. From that moment, the Tribulation is renamed the Great Tribulation. Until Jesus returns at the end of the seven years, literally all hell is going to break loose.

Evidence of His unending love for the Jews, He is telling them when this abomination happens, run and don't look back. God has reserved a place of refuge for those Jews who heed His warning. Many

Bible scholars believe this place will be the rock city of Petra. God will protect these people from the devastation the world is going to experience.

¹⁹ For *in* those days there will be tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the creation which God created until this time, nor ever shall be. ²⁰ And unless the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake, whom He chose, He shortened the days.

By the end of the seven years, more than 50% of the world's population will be wiped out. The Book of Revelation provides the terrifying details. Given sin has been devouring this world for roughly 6,000 years, and people have been rejecting Jesus for almost 2,000 years, the fact that the Great Tribulation only lasts 3 ½ years is an act of God's mercy. His mercy is for the elect – in this case, He is speaking of the Jewish remnant. His mercy led to this terrible time clearly being disproportionate with the number of years sin has polluted His perfect creation.

²¹ “Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here *is* the Christ!’ or, ‘Look, *He is* there!’ do not believe it.

²² For false christs and false prophets will rise and show signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. ²³ But take heed; see, I have told you all things beforehand.

The fact that Jesus is compelled to twice warn of false christs in this teaching should get our attention. These people will be endowed with Satan's considerable power. For those who are not rooted in the Scriptures, they will be easy prey and fall victim to their powers. This is true for us even today. The prophecy that the church will be falling away as a sign of the end times, in my opinion, is being fulfilled right now. I believe a key reason, if not the key reason, is much of the church has watered down, or even removed, the teaching of God's Word. It is the truth, and the truth is the only weapon against a lie. The more lies you believe, the further you will get from God.

²⁴ “But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light;

²⁵ the stars of heaven will fall, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. ²⁶ Then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. ²⁷ And then He will send His angels, and gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest part of earth to the farthest part of heaven.

Jesus describes the scene just before He returns – He is recounting what was prophesied in Joel 2:28-32. Jesus came quietly and humbly the first time. His Second Coming will be the exact opposite. Everyone will know when He returns.

²⁸ “Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender, and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. ²⁹ So you also, when you see these things happening, know that it is near—at the doors! ³⁰ Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.

I've mentioned before that the fig tree is symbolic of the Nation of Israel. Here in verses 28-30, I believe, what Jesus is referring to is the re-emergence of the Nation of Israel. For the first time in world history, a nation that had been conquered and scattered abroad, reconvened and came back to occupy its land. In May 1948, the Nation of Israel was reestablished. If my interpretation of this is correct, then when Jesus says, “this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place,” is why I believe we are very close to the Rapture. There aren't that many years left that the generation born in 1948 will be around.

³¹ Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.

Jesus is confirming what Isaiah said in chapter 40, verse 8 of his book, “The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever.” There is nothing more powerful than God and His Word. It creates life. It saves life. It restores life. It gives life. This is one of the primary reasons I like teaching it – it has a life-giving, love displaying, and truth proving permanence to it.

³² “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father
³³ Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is. ³⁴ *It is* like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch. ³⁵ Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming—in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning— ³⁶ lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. ³⁷ And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!”

We wrap up today with one more warning from Jesus. He said in Acts 1:7, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority.” At this moment in Jesus’ existence, He was still limited given Him being in the form of person. I believe He truly, at that moment, did not know when He was returning. After His ascension and return to the throne with His Father, I have no doubt He knows when He’s returning. What are we to do? Watch. What are we to be watching for? From this teaching, we’re to be watching for the things Jesus said will happen that are signs for the Rapture. I believe we’re seeing much of this going on now.

Now this is just me speaking, but I believe we’re also to be watching out for each other. We’re to be loving others as God loves us – letting them know what it’s like to be loved like God does. Vickie and I have some 25 people just in 2-3 generations within our families that don’t know the LORD. They may not listen to His Word, but they may recognize His love through how we treat them. I would imagine each of you know many people who need Jesus.

We covered a lot of territory – some of it both exciting and, maybe a bit, scary. Let’ get into the questions.

1. Why is it so hard to love God completely?
2. Which is harder – to love God completely or love others at all?
3. When you heard Jesus describe the signs leading up to the Tribulation, do you think any of that is going on now?
4. Does the thought of the Tribulation bring fear to you?