

A Look at What's Coming: Keep Watch Mark 13:14-23

Daniel Akin, writing on this passage in his commentary on Mark, takes note of the subject here and calls it, “one of the most cryptic and difficult phases of the Bible.” Most commentators understand that Jesus’ teaching here has many layers and components that work together to convey what He means. They will usually note the three times an “abomination of desolation” in the prophecy of Daniel. That prophecy typically gets connected to an occasion in 167 or 168 B.C. when the Syrian king Antiochus Epiphanes attacked Jerusalem and raised an altar to the Greek god Zeus on top of the altar of burnt offerings and sacrificed pigs there.

Commentators, trying to understand why Jesus refers to these past events as an answer to the disciples’ questions about the destruction of the temple and the end of the world will also cite the actions of the Roman general Titus who destroyed the city of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 AD. That infiltration and desecration of the Temple would have come 35 years after Jesus and five years before the date Mark probably wrote the gospel, so there seems to be here not only a reference to a far past event but a warning of a near future event.

However, like much of biblical prophecy, there also seems to be a reference to a future, terrible “climactic event of horrible destruction and desecration just prior to our Lord’s second coming.” That means there is a warning here for us.

So, what is Jesus saying? What is the abomination of desolation? What are we supposed to be looking for? How do we understand and act in faith on the revelation Jesus gives us in these words?

I. Well, let’s take a look at what we know.

- A. First, whenever Jesus talks to His disciples about the future, his words are always meant “to change the way we live in the present.”** There is always an expectation of an immediate impact in the teaching of Jesus. His words are always relevant and transformational.
1. When He teaches us, “Do not be anxious,” He means for us to adopt our daily responses to life challenges with confidence in the sovereign working of God’s providence in our lives. He means for us to actively, intentionally accept by faith and apply by faith the word and work of God in us and for us for His glory and our joy.
 2. When Jesus teaches His disciples to “love one another,” He fully intends for those who live the call to follow Him to study carefully how and why Jesus loves and to implement God-honoring, Spirit-filled, Christ-exalting love for God and one another and our neighbors as the key characteristic of our lives. Jesus expects His words to have an immediate, transformational impact in who we are and how we live.
 3. When Jesus teaches us that we cannot successfully serve two masters, we cannot live devoted to God and self, or God and the world, or God and

money, He intends to force a choice. He intends for those who live His life in the world through faith and the Holy Spirit to make the choice He Himself made: to utterly, totally, completely, personally, and intentionally devote ourselves to God, to His glory, and to His purpose in our lives and in the world.

4. Jesus intends His teaching to alter the power structure in our lives.
 - a. He intends through His teaching to depose pride and self from the throne of our heart and establish God as the single, holy, sovereign ruler of our lives. Jesus means for His words to make an immediate, lifelong effect on us from the inside out.
 - b. Jesus teaches not as one who merely teaches for information or amusement but as God conveying to those He loves and for whom He dies a genuine, accurate, and true revelation of Himself so that through the knowledge of Him we might enter eternal life with Him.
5. So, why does Jesus answer His disciples in this way? Why speak of the difficulties, persecutions, and phenomena that He does, including this abomination of desolation, whatever it is?
 - a. To prepare His disciples for the intensity of experience their life of faith in the world will include.
 - b. To prepare His disciples for the ultimate role of their mission: proclaiming the gospel in word and deed to a condemned world.
 - c. To prepare His disciples for the coming cross and to certify in their minds His identity as the Savior.
 - d. To prepare His disciples to live in the present as citizens of the eternal kingdom.

B. There are other things we know as we ask, “What is the ‘abomination of desolation’ and what does Jesus intend for us to know and do with these words?”

1. We know that Mark, inspired by the Holy Spirit, has provided for us accurate details of the life and teaching of Jesus as God wants us to know them.
 - a. That means we should expect this passage to have a meaningful message for us.
 - b. We should expect that the message of this passage will add to the fulfilment of God’s mission to fill the earth with the knowledge of His glory, to draw the elect to faith, and to exalt Jesus as the Christ.
2. We also know that Jesus fulfilled His mission to reveal the heart, mind, and will of the Father through His life and His teaching.
 - a. The resurrection certifies the truthfulness and accuracy of all Christ’s teaching.
 - b. These words reveal God in some way with honesty and with the expectation they will be understood and embraced.
3. We also know there are historical and prophetic events to which Jesus may be pointing in order to make His point.

- a. Daniel
 - b. Antiochus
 - c. Titus
4. We know this teaching reaches at least four audiences.
- a. There is the audience **to** whom Jesus delivers this message: His disciples as He is seated on the Mount of Olives answering their questions about the destruction of the Temple and the end of the world.
 - b. There is also the audience **for** whom Jesus delivers the message: those who will experience the events Jesus describes.
 - c. There is Mark's original audience, those to whom this gospel narrative is delivered, the church in Rome, in the later days of the first century, prior to the destruction of Jerusalem.
 - d. The other audience is **the church**, the people waiting for the return of Jesus to whom the Spirit delivers this message.
5. Jesus opens this teaching by saying, "When you see . . ."
- a. The Grk word *bleppo*
 - b. Whatever the abomination of desolation is, it will be recognizable, understandable to those who have been made aware of its significance
 - c. **Mark 13:23 (ESV) *But be on guard; I have told you all things beforehand.***
6. We also know that Jesus describes a season of great tribulation and trouble for the people of Judea that commences with the defilement of the abomination of desolation "standing where he ought not be."
- a. We do not know,
 - (1) from the wording here, that the desolation is standing in the temple.
 - (2) That is inferred from Daniel and the events of history
 - b. We do know this is a male figure standing somewhere he does not belong, and his presence there should appall faithful sensibilities
 - (1) abomination of desolation
 - (2) appalling sacrilege
7. The final fact we know is that throughout the season of tribulation, God remains sovereign, guiding human history and experience to accomplish His purpose in, for, and through those He has chosen for His own.
- a. **The appropriate response of the informed faithful is diligence.**
 - b. Be on your guard. Keep watch. See! Stay awake.
 - (1) Pay attention to your theology.
 - (2) Pay attention to your times.
 - (3) Pray
 - (a) for discernment
 - (b) for insight
 - (c) for courage, devotion, commitment
 - (d) for wisdom

- (4) Pay attention to your spiritual environment
 - (a) **2 Corinthians 13:5 (ESV)** *Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves.*
 - (b) **1 Thessalonians 5:21 (ESV)** *but test everything; hold fast what is good.*
 - (c) **1 John 4:1 (ESV)** *Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.*
 - (d) **2 Timothy 4:5 (ESV)** *As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.*

II. What If?

A. We don't know with precision what the abomination of desolation is.

1. We do know a great deal
2. We know we will recognize him when we see him.
3. But we really do not know the exact who, what, or when.

B. What if?

1. The "abomination of desolation" can be fairly understood as the most appalling sacrilege you have ever witnessed.
2. What if,
 - a. Given that the purpose of the gospel of Mark is to verify that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God
 - b. Given that Jesus has repeatedly warned His disciples of his pending death
 - c. Given that Paul writes in Romans 1 that the resurrection of Jesus certifies before the world that He is the Son of God
3. **What if the cross of Jesus Christ the Son of God is the most appalling sacrilege ever witnessed by human eyes?**
 - a. What if the Son of God, who ought to be enthroned in the heavens and worshiped without end by all creation, nailed to a cross by sinful creation IS the single most appalling sacrilege ever to be imagined?
 - b. What if we looked at the cross, at Jesus the Son of God dying there, and we said, "Wait! He doesn't belong there!"
 - c. What if Jesus is referring to the cross as the single event that will mark the end of the Temple and the beginning of the end of the world?
 - (1) What if His death on the cross makes the Temple obsolete?
 - (2) What if His death on the cross is the final spiritual event that prepares the way for the new heavens and new earth, and that all that is left is gathering the elect, the new citizens of the new kingdom, who become citizens through faith in the crucified, risen King?
4. **If this is the case, and we have been looking for the wrong thing, then**

it behooves us to return to the cross and marvel!

- a. How significant is the cross of Christ in your personal world?
 - b. What immediate impact does the death of the Son of God have on your daily expectations and experiences?
 - c. Does your life of faith neutralize or exalt the appalling nature of the sacrifice of the Son of God for your sin and guilt and shame?
5. Is grace merely one item on the menu of experiences you draw from each day or is the life and death of Jesus the Savior the very life-giving breath for which you live and without which you might as well die?
6. Many Christians today are not appalled at the cross but we should be.
- a. “It was my sin that held Him there!”
 - b. Can you really approach the cross with casual nonchalance, minimizing the appalling sacrilege of the death of the Son of God as if, “Sure he died, but I’m so worth it and He so knew it.”
7. Why is the cross not an appalling sacrilege for us?
- a. Why do we not treat the death of the Son of God as the pivotal moment not only in human history but in our own personal history?
 - b. Why do we treat the cross with so little reverence? So little honor? So little awe?
8. So many of us focus on the work of our own hands and exalt our own efforts at advancing our own standing among men rather than focusing on Christ and what God has done to change our standing before our Creator.
- a. We have been deluded and lured into “living our best life now,” a self-focused concentration on personal experience rather than cultivating a deep appreciation and response to the appalling sacrilege of the death of the Son of God on the cross!
 - b. We devote our time and attention and efforts on career moves and educational advances, on ministry opportunities and recreational renewal, on child-rearing and Facebook controversies, but where is Christ, where is the cross in the life of today’s Christians?
 - (1) Where is the humbling, awe-struck awareness of the appalling sacrilege of the cross?
 - (2) Where is the mourning and grief and repentance that the holy, righteous, and true Son of God should take my sins on Himself and bear them in His body on the cross?
 - (3) Where is the mouth-shutting, arrogance-defeating wonder that the Author of life should die, not merely on my behalf, but for my fault?
9. Jesus did not die on the cross for the sins of the whole world.
- a. He died on the cross for your sin, for my sin.
 - b. He did not suffer the beating and the nails and the crown of thorns; he did not breathe His last and deliver up His life and spirit for some anonymous “Somebody” away off in history or geography.
 - (1) Jesus died for you.

- (2) You put Him there.
 - (3) You are the reason for the appalling sacrilege of the death of the Son of God!
10. And that ought to make a difference in your life in the world.
- a. The appalling sacrilege of the cross should not be missing from the life of any authentic disciple called by the Master to carry a cross of their own.

C. The appalling sacrilege of the cross has been raised on the hill of human history.

- 1. Christian, take action.
- 2. Flee from your pursuit of the world and worldly things.
- 3. Cling to Christ and the cross.
- 4. Take stock of what you value most in the world, and trade it for the cross.
- 5. Wake up! Pay Attention! See!