

The Gospel According to Mark - Realignment of Priorities

August 25, 2019

A New Alignment of Priorities

Mark 13:14-23

Introduction

"I tasted the world, seen more than enough, it's promises fleeting. Of water and wine, I emptied the cup, and found myself wanting But there is a well that never runs dry

The water of life, the blood of the vine." Folks, when a person has emptied the cup of the world's pleasures, they will find themselves wanting! The world just can only satisfy temporarily, and that satisfaction will always be shallow. That's why many times when a person comes to faith in Christ, there will be a new alignment of priorities! It's just different. Today we're going to continue our discussion on the words Jesus spoke concerning the end times. There will be a different set of priorities for people when the worst of the end times events happen. But I believe we as followers of Christ should already be living with new priorities. Let's pray and we'll talk about that. Pray!

Before we get started this morning I wanted to say this: There are many who have spent years studying and researching end times Scripture. I respect the enormous time and thought these folks have given to help the rest of us understand the events of the end times in a better way. I have benefited from their countless hours of study. I just wanted to make sure that you all know I'm not against the study of end times events. However, I do believe, as I've stated in the last few weeks, we must make sure that our priorities remain what they are supposed to be and where they are supposed to be!

I have not given the subject of end times the same kind of time others have, not because it's unimportant, but because the Lord has led me to concentrate on other areas of ministry. This probably does have some affect on the way I handle apocalyptic material. While I know there are both historic and futuristic meanings to be discovered in the verses which deal with end times, I tend to focus on the implications for the here and now. I believe if we are careful how we live, knowing the days are evil, but keep our priorities where they should be, the end of time as we know it will not catch us unprepared! Remember, "when" Jesus comes is not as important as us being ready whenever He comes!

The passage we're about to read this morning from Mark's Gospel is fascinating and at the same time disturbing. There's a lot of things we could take away from this passage concerning the end times, and there's things it tells us that actually speak of things historical in nature, things that have already happened in the past. However, if we're willing to see it, it will give us some very practical insight into how we are to live our lives right here and now!! Sometimes we zoom in and look at details. That's not bad, it's actually good, but we don't need to forget to zoom out and get a broader, bigger picture as well! When we read our passage today we're going to do both. We'll look at some of the details, but as we zoom out we're going to discover this very important principle...

When the end times Jesus spoke of begin to happen there will be a sudden shift in priorities, a new alignment of priorities. Let's read our text and then I'll explain. Mark 13:14-23.

Mark 13:14 "When you see 'the abomination that causes desolation' standing where it does not belong--let the reader understand--then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.

Mark 13:15 Let no one on the roof of his house go down or enter the house to take anything out.

Mark 13:16 Let no one in the field go back to get his cloak.

Mark 13:17 How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers!

Mark 13:18 Pray that this will not take place in winter,

Mark 13:19 because those will be days of distress unequalled from the beginning, when God created the world, until now--and never to be equaled again.

Mark 13:20 If the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would survive. But for the sake of the elect, whom he has chosen, he has shortened them.

Mark 13:21 At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ !' or, 'Look, there he is!' do not believe it.

Mark 13:22 For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and miracles to deceive the elect--if that were possible.

Mark 13:23 So be on your guard; I have told you everything ahead of time.

So Jesus repeats His instruction for us to be on our guard! Jesus had previously said this in verse 5...

Mark 13:5 ... "Watch out that no one deceives you."

and in verse 9...

Mark 13:9 "You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them.

and now a third time here in verse 23...

Mark 13:23 So be on your guard; I have told you everything ahead of time.

When Jesus repeats something three times in one teaching, you know it must be really important!!!

Last week we read a small portion of the "Little Apocalypse" found in Luke's Gospel. Remember this verse?

Luke 21:34 "Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap.

So it seems to me Jesus is really emphasizing that we should...

Be Ready!!

How do we get ready? Of course the first thing is to accept Jesus as your Savior and then begin allowing Him, on a daily basis, to be your Lord! He will give you the wisdom and the strength to begin living a new life by way of His Holy Spirit!! This has to do with the new alignment of priorities that begins to form within a person once they receive Jesus as Savior! This is described in the Book of Ephesians...

Eph 5:15 Be very careful, then, how you live--not as unwise but as wise,

Eph 5:16 making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.

Eph 5:17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.

Eph 5:18 Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.

Now did you notice Paul says the we are to be careful how we live, not as unwise, but as wise and we are to make the most of every opportunity? What opportunities would he be referring to? What should we be doing while we await the return of Christ? I believe with all my heart Jesus gave us the answer in Matthew 24:44-46, where He says we are to...

Be Found Serving!

Mat 24:44 So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

Mat 24:45 "Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time?"

Mat 24:46 It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns

Jesus said we are to be ready, but also we are to be found serving. In other words, as I said previously, we are not to go to the mountains or to the middle of Honey Island Swamp and hunker down at the fish camp until Jesus comes. No, we are to be about the Father's business, His mission, being ambassadors for Christ and training those who become a part of the family of God, on how they too are to be ambassadors for Christ. Serving God by serving others is what we are to be all about. As I shared with you last week, we are called by God to be His ambassadors. As ambassadors for Christ we are not all about the pomp and circumstance that usually accompanies a political ambassador! Ambassadors for Christ live to serve and that loving service is a huge part of what opens the doors for our message! Remember last week I talked about how our lives need to be authentic, truthful, filled with integrity and the righteousness of God. When

we are called before the councils, governors, and kings, to testify to them, it stands to reason we must have a testimony! What's your testimony going to be? It certainly should be about how Jesus saved your soul and promised you an eternity in heaven with Him, but it should also be about the life change that has happened and the realignment of priorities that took place in your life. Why am I so passionate about this? Because Jesus was so passionate about this. Listen to what He said...

Matthew 25:35 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in,

Matthew 25:36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

Matthew 25:37 "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?

Matthew 25:38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you?

Matthew 25:39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

Matthew 25:40 "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

And we read this in the book of Hebrews...

Hebrews 6:10 God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them.

Hebrews 6:11 We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, so that what you hope for may be fully realized.

Hebrews 6:12 We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.

Now that we've established that we are to be found ready and also be found serving, whenever Jesus comes again, let's look at some of the details of our text for today. I believe you will find these things not only very interesting, but also very helpful as we look for the practical applications to our lives here and now!! Let's pick up where we left off with Jesus' discourse on end times with His disciples. He says...

Mark 13:14 "When you see 'the abomination that causes desolation' standing where it does not belong--let the reader understand--then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.

Historical Meaning

"The abomination that causes desolation"

The disciple's minds would have certainly traveled back in time and thought about these words from the book of Daniel 9:27, 11:31, 12:11. So your wondering what is the abomination that causes desolation?

Another way to say this would be "desolating sacrilege", which according to the Broadman Commentary, is a phrase from the Greek translation of the apocalypse of Daniel. The actual Hebrew language would be better translated "appalling horror." Here's what Henry Turlington said in his commentary on this...

"It described the awful abomination against the Hebrew faith and people which was done when Antiochus (An-ty-uh-cus) Epiphanes attempted to stamp out the worship of the Lord. His forces covered God's altar with a heathen altar and sacrificed swine meat to the Olympian Zeus. This was in 168 B.C. and it triggered the Maccabean revolt."

The disciples would have thought about this horrible event, because it also accompanied the massacre of many Jewish people in Jerusalem. So Jesus was using a past event to describe a future event.

Futuristic Meaning

Most scholars believe Jesus is referring to the Antichrist who will come on the scene and set himself up to be a world leader and ultimately would lead from Jerusalem. Paul wrote these words about this event in 2 Thessalonians 2...

2 Th 2:1 Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers,

2 Th 2:2 not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come.

2 Th 2:3 Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction.

2 Th 2:4 He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God.

Now I want to share with you something my friend Brad Thompson wrote in his book "THE RAPTURE PARADIGM" about this event. The book, by the way is not yet available, so you won't find it yet, Brad says...

"But if we study all of the prophecies concerning the role of the Antichrist in the last days, it becomes quite clear that when he brokers the deal for the peace treaty the world will experience a temporary period of peace and prosperity. It will appear as though he has saved mankind from world war and economic disaster. He becomes the world's messiah and is worshipped because of his command of global affairs."

Brad then references this passage in the Book of Revelation...

"The whole world was astonished and followed the beast and asked, "Who is like the beast? Who can make war against him?" ... "All the inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast..." (Revelation 13:4 and 8 NIV)

Is that not simply fascinating? I know some of you would like for me to dig a little deeper and give you some more details about the end of time as we know it. But it's now time that we discover the...

Implications for the Here and Now

Let's listen to Jesus' description of those future days and we'll find some implications for our lives today. Jesus said...

Mark 13:15 Let no one on the roof of his house go down or enter the house to take anything out.

Mark 13:16 Let no one in the field go back to get his cloak.

Mark 13:17 How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers!

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Mark 13:21 At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ !' or, 'Look, there he is!' do not believe it.

So once again, it sure sounds to me like Christians will be here when this takes place. And here's the practical insight from what Jesus says people should do...

There will be a new alignment of priorities!

Material Things Will Lose Their Importance!

Before I talk about the application for our lives today, I must mention two things: First, during the Jewish revolt against Rome in A.D. 66-70 "the city offered no refuge, and it was safer to hide in the caves in the mountains. Eusebius tells us that the Christians did not attempt to find safety in Jerusalem, but fled and established the church in Pella." Broadman Commentary. So there were people back in the day, who would have found these words of Jesus to be very practical for what they were going through not too many years after Jesus lived in this world. Secondly, Jesus' words speak of how in the end time days of tribulation people will not be concerned with personal possessions but with survival and salvation. Jesus said that people were not to be concerned with all their stuff! They would flee to the mountains. Now we're not talking

about people taking all of their survival gear and heading to the mountain camp to await Jesus' return. We're talking about people who are being persecuted fleeing for their very lives. As you and I can only imagine, because we've not been in that kind of situation, the things of this world would not seem nearly as important! And this has implications for the here and now.

Don't wait for the end times tribulation to get your priorities right! Ask yourself where your priorities are? Are you solely focused on material things and building up your store of possessions in this world? While I certainly don't think it's wrong to live life and to have a home and to plan for your future here on this earth, the lesson we must learn from this Scripture is that this world is not our eternal home and someday, life as we know it will come to an end. That will happen on a large scale to people when we enter the time known as the great tribulation. However, the ending of life and time as we know it, happens daily to individuals when they pass away. You've heard me say this before, but when it comes to material wealth and things, "You can't take it with you!" It won't do you any good to hook up a u-haul trailer to the hearse. So you must think about where your priorities are. When the great tribulation comes, priorities will by necessity, be different. Now I'm not talking about being extreme and weird on this. While some would try to gather all their stuff up and take it to their mountain camp, along with their arsenal of weapons to protect their stuff, I think it would be just as destructive and wrong for you to sale everything you have and make your family homeless and sit on the side of the street with a sign that says, "Jesus is coming this year, sale everything and come sit here with me."

Don't misinterpret what I'm saying. I've known people who sold everything they had and went on the mission field. If God's leading you to do that, praise God and He will meet your needs. This is not about having possessions or not, it's about your priorities! My wife and I bought a piece of property after hurricane Katrina and built a home. The reason? We just love the country and knew we had to have a place to live. Little did I know how badly I would need a place to recharge my batteries so I could do the ministry God has called me to do! However, I've prayed, and still pray that I will always remember this earth is not my final home and I'm here to be on mission for our Lord and His causes. I thank God for everything we have, but I want know that my God is way more important to me than my stuff. I want to always be willing for God to be the director of how my material blessings are used and to be willing for Him to redirect any of my resources for His Kingdom use at any time! I don't ever want to forget that...

Acts 20:35 ...the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'

Not everyone has this understanding of priorities in life. Not long after Hurricane Katina, Debbie and I celebrated our 26th anniversary. It had been a pretty stressful time, so went up to Natchez to stay at a Bed and Breakfast inn. One morning we sat around the table talking with two other couples who had stayed at the old home. One couple was from New Orleans. He was a very successful lawyer. The other couple were from Houma. He was in the corporate world and she was an interior designer. One of the ladies said, "Since Katrina, we now realize we could loose everything tomorrow, (I'm thinking great here comes a great spiritual insight, she continued...) so we've decided that this time around it doesn't matter and we're buying stuff we really want." In fact the reason both of these couples had come to Natchez was to shop for expensive antiques with which to replenish their homes. Debbie and I were thinking, "boy we're out of our league." Nothing wrong with buying expensive antiques to replenish your home, but if you're simple living for the things of this world, you will never be truly satisfied, and someday you may realize to late that the most important things in life are not things at all, but rather the relationships and friendships you have with family, friends and most of all, with God! In fact James had something to say about this and it is such great wisdom...

James 4:13 Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money."

James 4:14 Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.

James 4:15 Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that."

So I would encourage you again, as I did last week, don't worry or fret about "when" Jesus is coming back, just be ready when He does return. Realign your priorities so that Jesus is first place in your life and allow Him to give you the wisdom to know how to prioritize your material blessings and how to set priorities in your relationships with others, your family, your friends and even your enemies! Maybe these words from Jesus' sermon on the mount could help us realign our priorities for today and be ready when Jesus does come back...

Matthew 6:31 So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'

Matthew 6:32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.

Matthew 6:33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Matthew 6:34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Let's pray!