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**“HIGH Alert!”**  
Mark 13

My eyes darted around the room but I could see nothing. My ears strained to hear – but the effort only resulted in greater fear: “What was that noise? The wind? An intruder. A monster? I burrowed deeper into the covers of my bed. Sleep was out of the question. My heart was racing. My senses were on high alert. As a six year old I had (perhaps like you did at that age) a vivid imagination. And when Mom and Dad left the house for an evening out, I remember after the babysitter put me to bed laying in my bed watching and listening with all my might for their return. I rarely fell asleep before they got home. And I remember so well that feeling of relief I had when I heard their car pull into the driveway. The sound of the car doors and the jingling of keys were like music to my ears. “Ah! Mommy and Daddy are home. I am safe. The fear is gone. All is well.” And then I would fall asleep.

Can you relate to the feelings in this story? First, have you ever been in a situation where your senses were on high alert? Your eyes and ears fully open – seeing and hearing everything? Maybe when you felt you were in danger, or about to go on stage to perform, or close a big deal. Or after a *venti coffee* from Starbucks – fully alert and awake! Or, do you remember the last time you were afraid. Maybe for a good reason, maybe just afraid of the unknown. Maybe you have come to church this morning full of fear – fear of failure, fear of the future. Fear is the most common human emotion. And, then finally, have you ever known that sweet, warm, blessed feeling of a period of separation coming to an end. Knowing that a parent, or a spouse or a child has returned home safely. The joy of being

reunited is a special joy. Being alert, being afraid and the return of a loved one – these are the emotions and themes of Mark chapter 13.

Turn with me to Mark chapter 13. This morning we are going to attempt to get through the entire chapter. This is a difficult task for two reasons. First, nearly everything in this chapter is a prophecy about the future. We move from narrative to apocalyptic literature. This chapter is different than any other chapter in Mark – it is like a whole different animal. Second, we have topic-soup. The other gospels handle this material with many more verses and context. Here Mark has thrown all Jesus' teachings about the future into one chapter - it is very dense. One commentary said, "this is one of the most perplexing chapters of the Bible to understand" (Edwards, 383).

So here is the game plan. First, I will present to you how I am going to interpret the passage, overall. I recognize there are different ways to interpret prophecies and you don't have to agree with my view – but that is where we start. Then we will look at some of the details in a problem / solution / application structure. Jesus wanted his disciples to know that in the future they would face problems and challenges. And then Jesus provides solutions – things to know and things to do in order to overcome the challenges – in the solution we will find our application.

### **Interpretive Framework – Overview**

Our interpretive framework / over view starts in verses 1-4, set in A.D. 30, right before the death of Jesus. After all the conflict with the religious leaders, Jesus and his disciples leave the temple and go to the Mount of Olives. On the way, one of the disciples remarks about the immense beauty of the temple. We talked about the grand scale and

beauty of the temple a few weeks ago. It was the 1<sup>st</sup> century equivalent of Jerry Jones' new stadium. It was big, expensive, beautiful and a source of great pride. So Jesus says, "[Mark 13:2](#) "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left upon another which will not be torn down." Certainly not the remark they expected. So, privately, some of the disciples ask, "[When will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are going to be fulfilled](#)" (4). When will the temple be destroyed and how will we know when it happens?

And so verses 5-23 detail those things leading up to the destruction of the temple which we know occurred in A.D. 70, 40 years later, by Roman General Titus Flavius. The temple was completely and utterly destroyed. In Rome you can visit the Arch of Titus – which to this day commemorates his success. You can actually see on this arch Temple artifacts being carried away as spoils of war.

Then in verse 24, the scene changes with this phrase, "[But in those days, after that tribulation...](#)" (24). With this phrase Mark takes us farther into the future – past the destruction of the Temple. Verses 24-37 change gears and talk about the return of Jesus at some unknown future date: [Then they will see THE SON OF MAN COMING IN CLOUDS with great power and glory. And then he will gather forth the angels, and will gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest end of the earth to the farthest end of heaven](#) (26-27).

So our text moves from A.D. 30 hours before the death of Jesus into the future – to A.D. 70 and the destruction of the temple, and then past that to a prophecy about the return of Jesus.

## Problems

Now let's look again at our text at some (not all) of the details – First, what problems and challenges did Jesus predict his followers would face? I would like for us to observe three of the problems from our text.

The first problem is that of false teachers, look at verse 6, “See to it that no one misleads you. Many will come in My name saying, “I am He!” and will mislead many.” And he returns that that theme in verse 21-22, “And then if anyone says to you, ‘Behold He is there: do not believe him; for false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show signs and wonders, in order to lead astray, if possible the elect.” The problem is False teachers and Jesus is worried that his disciples will be deceived by them. Is this still a problem today? Some organizations estimate upward of 2,000 pseudo-Christian cults in the United States alone. False teaching includes just enough of the truth to sound convincing, so that people will be deceived. One of Satan's primary strategies is to raise-up false teachers and religions in order to confuse people and to hide the truth.

The second problem is persecution, verse 9, “But be on your guard; for they will deliver you to the courts, and you will be flogged in the synagogues, and you will stand before the governors and king for My sake, as a testimony to them.” Verse 13, “You will be hated by all because of My name...” Jesus knew that his followers would pay a price for their devotion to Him - and they did, and still do. While we strive to live at peace with all men the claims of the gospel have and will always provoke intense persecution. Don't be surprised by it. And in the same way false teaching led to deception. Persecution can lead to quitting – abandoning the faith because of the pressure of persecution.

False teachers and persecution were challenges Jesus knew his followers would face. And the third problem is what I am going to call distraction. Jesus knew that he was going to be gone for a time and he worried his followers would get tired of waiting for him: verse 35-37, “Therefore, be on the alert, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming, whether in the evening, at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning – in case he should come suddenly and find you asleep. What I say to you I say to all, be on the alert.” The average adult attention span is 20 minutes – I have already started losing some of you! Jesus has been gone 20 centuries. Jesus knew we would be tempted fall asleep on the job. When you are distracted you stop working on God’s work and you focus on your own desires.

Those are the three major problems Jesus identifies for his disciples and for us (1) false teachers who deceive (2) persecution that pressures you to abandon their faith and (3) spiritual slumber / distraction that will stop the work of the kingdom.

## **Solutions**

Now what are the solutions to these problems? First – the solution to false teaching is in verse five: “See to it that no one misleads you” (5). The disciples had the responsibility of NOT being misled by false teachers. Counterfeit currency is a huge problem in the United States – with computer programs and laser printers. The US Government estimated in 2006 that \$200 Billion dollars of counterfeit money is circulated each year. One report stated: “The key to counterfeiters’ success is lack of training and inattention by cashiers.” To help solve this problem, the government has put out a poster called, “Know Your Money” which details all the security features and designs of orthodox money – real money.

You see the point. If the disciples of Jesus and you and I are to *see to it that* we are not deceived by fake faiths – we must be very, very familiar with orthodox doctrine of the church. That is why we recite the Nicene Creed several times a year. That is why we have Sunday School and Christian Education, Bible studies and sermons. Also, we can study the false doctrines so we see their flaws. One of the weeks during Mission’s month we are going to have James Walker of Watchman fellowship share with us about counterfeit Christianity. This ministry researches false teaching so that Christians will not be deceived.

Second - What is Jesus’ solution to those facing persecution for their faith. (By solution I don’t mean to stop persecution, but rather how is a person under persecution to respond.) There are three exhortations. First, Jesus says: **“Be on your guard” (9)** The Greek is literally “watch yourselves.” The idea is to prepare your expectations for suffering. David Garland wrote, “The disciples are to attend to the personal implications of what will happen to them... so that they will not be surprised and can respond appropriately when suffering overtakes them” (493). Be prepared for suffering – expect it to occur.

Second with respect to persecution we read in verse 10, **“The gospel must first be preached to all the nations.”** Satan wants to use suffering to stop the work of the Kingdom; but Jesus’ call is to keep the message moving, even during times of suffering.

The story is told of a Menonite woman named Meyken Wens in Antwerp Belgium in the 16<sup>th</sup> century who was arrested for preaching the gospel of Christ. She underwent the inquisition for heresy and was tortured but she would not buckle under their pressure. After six months, she would not promise to stop preaching so the authorities did what they thought they had to do – they sentenced her to death. Included in the sentence was a stipulation that her tongue be screwed fast to the roof of her mouth so that she could not

preach as she was led to the stake to be burned. But burned she was – in front of her teenage son Adrian and her three year old son Hans. After the ashes cooled Adrian found the tongue screw and kept it as a reminder to himself never to stop preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus told his disciples persecution will come to you – but do not let it stop the preaching of the gospel.

And finally, with respect to persecution, Jesus says, “**the one who endures to the end, he will be saved**” (13).– Over and over in the New Testament (1Cor 4:12, 2 Thes 1:4, 2 Tim 4:5, Heb 11:25, 1 Peter 2:20), the exhortation to Christians who are being persecuted is to endure – one more year, one more month, one more day for the sake of Christ and the Gospel. Don’t give up. Don’t abandon your faith because of suffering. Endure.

And finally, what is the solution to spiritual distraction? The command is repeated four times – *be on the alert* – don’t fall asleep. How do you do this? Let me give you two suggestions. First, stay connected to the local church. Hebrews 10:24-25 – how do you stimulate one another to love and good deeds? By not forsaking the assembling together. Second, focus on the return of Jesus. We focus quite a bit of energy on the first coming – with Christmas, but we don’t focus much on the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming. There is one website that has a Rapture index – they have a formula based on 45 factors that tries to capture how ready we are for Christ’s return. That is NOT what I am saying. Predictions about the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Jesus have been a great embarrassment to the church. Rather through devotional study, and public worship – make it a point to remind yourself that Jesus is going to return.

## **Closing Story**

I would like to close with this story. A president of a company traveled to Europe for an indefinite period of time set up a new branch. He left his executive assistant in charge of the home office and sent him regular letters and instructions in the mail. His expectations for his assistant were clear.

The months passed, and finally the president returned. He was stunned, however, as he drove down to the office – the grass and weeds had grown up high. A few windows along the street were broken. He walked into the Receptionist's room to find her doing her nails, chewing gum and listening to her favorite radio station. He looked around and noticed the wastebaskets were overflowing. The carpet hadn't been vacuumed for weeks, and nobody seemed concerned about it.

He found his executive assistant finishing a chess game with the sales manager. The President asked him to step into his office and asked: "What in the world is going on, man! Look at this place! It's a mess!"

"Well," he said sheepishly, "We didn't expect you so soon." He added defensively, "And a few people left the firm when they were attacked by our competitors. A bunch of them just quit last week! That made the president very sad as they were valuable employees and had just missed his return.

But he said, "You are still here. Didn't you get my letters? I said I would return. What have you been doing anyway?"

"Letters? Oh yes! Sure! We got them. But it became confusing when the quality control manager brought in some other letters – He said that they were from you, too, even though they were on different stationary." Those letters told us to spend the cash reserves

on ourselves. "How could you believe that?" asked the president. It is the opposite of my wishes.

That is what I said," said the executive director. And so a few of us got serious about your letters. We had a letter study every Friday night. We even divided the staff into small groups to discuss many of the things you wrote. Some of the things were really interesting. You will be pleased to know that a few of us have actually committed to memory some of your sentences and paragraphs.

"OK, said the President, You got my letters. You studied them and meditated on them. But what did you do about them?" Well, confessed the director, I guess we got distracted – we thought we had more time to get the work done."

"I'm disappointed with you," said the president. You fell asleep at the wheel."

In many ways that is what is happened to the church of Jesus Christ as we wait for his 2<sup>nd</sup> coming. We've been deceived by false teaching. We have been losing members through persecution and all the while we doze spiritually, no longer looking for the Return of Christ. May we here, at LCCC be found grounded in true doctrine, enduring through difficulty and alter, ready for our Lord's return. Let's pray.

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