

## Study following Sunday November 29th

**Prepare:** Advent Sunday marks the start of a new year in the Christian Church calendar. Each year the set readings focus on a different one of the 'Synoptic' Gospels - Matthew, Mark or Luke. They are 'synoptic' because they recall Jesus' life from a similar point of view. John's Gospel is used for the special occasions and festivals. Think about the part of the Bible you know well, and those parts you do not know so well.

**Praise:** Spend time thanking God for his revelation through Jesus Christ, and the Gospel writers who recorded it for us to read.

**Passage:** Read Mark 13 24-37

**Ponder:** Having ended last year reading Matthew's account of Jesus' final teaching on the end times, we now jump back into the midst of that teaching recorded by Mark. Jesus' cosmic weather report is drawing from some Old Testament prophecy such as:

- Isaiah 13.10, Joel 2.10, Amos 8.9

The sense is not necessarily of cosmic destruction but of the cosmos cowering and fearful before God, its mighty creator. This is followed by a picture of Jesus' second coming, sometimes known as the 'Parousia' from the Greek word for 'presence' or 'arrival'. It seems that whilst his first coming was quiet, gentle and hidden, this second coming will be quite the opposite.

- What, if anything, have you heard about Jesus' second coming?

- Do you think it is something to look forward to, or not?

Jesus speaks of the angels going out to gather in the 'elect', those who have been faithful to God. This links back to God gathering those who have been scattered.

- Deuteronomy 30.3-4, Isaiah 43.6, Jeremiah 32.37

Jesus then begins to explain that although no-one, not even he, knows when these things will happen, there will be signs to look for. All this has created a number of problems for those trying to interpret this passage. The principal difficulty is the phrase in verses 29 and 30 'these things', and a question around whether this refers to the coming of the 'Son of Man' or the events leading up to an event referred to back in chapter 13 verse 14 the 'abomination that causes desolation'.

Clearly the Son of Man has not returned yet, but the 'abomination that causes desolation' is understood to refer to the destruction of Jerusalem, and particularly the temple by the Romans in AD70.

- Read the whole of Chapter 13 and consider the dilemma above. Also note that the motivation to this teaching is the disciples' question in verse 4.

The danger of adopting the 'Son of Man', as the event referred to, is that Jesus then appears to be mistaken about 'this generation' unless that can be twisted to mean something different. So I am persuaded that Jesus is referring to the destruction of the temple, and Mark is recounting a prophecy that would come true a few years later, as Mark's Gospel is usually dated somewhere between AD 55 and AD 65.

All in all, Jesus' focus for us, in the passage, is actually not to ruminate on the when or how of his return, but to be watchful. We need to keep on with our 'assigned task', faithful to our master and Lord. We need to listen for the call at each season and stage of our lives. When Jesus comes again the timing and manner may be a surprise, but what he will be looking for in us should not be a surprise. Our part of the covenant is revealed in the Gospel, in God's word, and in the work of the Spirit in our hearts.

**Pray:** Pray for all those who are going through difficult times at the moment, those we know personally or have seen in the news. Ask God to bring comfort and peace.

Stephen Partridge 2020 with reference to ideas from the NIV Study Bible and 'Mark' Garland 1996.