



Advent #1

Be alert, God is faithful

w/c 3 December 2023

"God loves each of us as if there were only one of us." (Augustine of Hippo)

Read Mark 13:24–37

This is the final section of that part of Mark's gospel known as the Olivet discourse – Jesus is responding to his disciples' question (13:4) regarding the ultimate fate of the "magnificent" Temple buildings.

How do you feel when approaching passages such as this – with its parallels in Matthew 24 and Luke 21? Apprehension? A wish that (like John) the synoptic writers hadn't included it? Or a warm glow that all will be well in the end?

Remember that it all starts with Jesus apparently pointing forward to the physical destruction of the Temple which was to take place less than forty years later in AD70. The rest of the discourse then seems to interweave prophecies concerning that destruction and others looking forward to the, yet inconceivable, end of creation. Some would say that it's all about one of those events; and some that it's just the other, or that it's more to do with events today. Might we see Jerusalem's fall as a 'type' for what will happen one day? In what ways do you think that the texts point to physical or spiritual outcomes?

Should it become our focus to reflect on events two millennia ago or ones somewhere in the deep future? Rather than either of those, for us today, the key surely must be to focus on our "*assigned task*" (v34). We cannot (and must not) ever forget that we live in the 'in-between' days. Jesus, in describing his kingdom, made it clear that it is something we have entered into and yet it is also something to look forward to; to watch for. Note that the verb used in v35 for our watching is plural. It's for the church as a whole, not for us to individually worry about.

How should this overlap between the 'now' and the 'not yet' affect us in our lives today? In a book I've recently finished reading, the author¹ notes that:

"As Christians, we have to understand that we cannot predict the future but we can live prophetically now, taking account of the best scientific know-how, economic practices and "Earth-friendly" lifestyles to enable the planet and all its/God's people to share more equally in its future."

Biblical prophecy is not "telling the future" like some mystic charlatan in a fairground or roadside booth.

Biblical prophecy is reminding people that unless we live as God intends, both we as individuals and communities or nations, will separate ourselves from the divine purpose."

How does this affect your understanding of our passage in Mark?

Read 1 Corinthians 1:3–9

Do we believe that (like the Corinthians) we have actually been "*enriched in every way*"? If so, how much more could we get on and use those gifts throughout our lives; the humdrum everyday bits as well as those in church or attracting a 'religious' label?

As we read passages such as these two it may be useful to remember that the New Testament writers had in mind a universe of just the Earth, Sun, Moon, five planets and a countable number of stars. Today we are aware of a universe of (conservatively) 200 billion galaxies each with maybe 100 billion stars and standing on a timeline of almost 14 billion years. How might that affect our understanding of their intent?

¹ Oikos by Andrew Francis – to read more see his website: www.anmchara.com