

Eastwood Baptist (PM, 18/3/18) **WATCH OUT! BE READY!** (Mark 13:1-37)

**Introduction** I want you to imagine that you had taken a visitor to Sydney to see the Opera House. If you're like me, you'd be hoping that the visitor would admire it. But now imagine that the visitor had received the gift of prophecy, and said that God had revealed that the Opera House would be utterly destroyed. How would you feel? This might give you some idea, although an inadequate one, of how the disciples felt at the beginning of this morning's passage.

**The Destruction of the Temple** (13:1-2) **Read vv.1-2.** It is clear that the disciples, like other Jews of their day, took great pride in the rebuilding of the temple. And it was more than the sort of pride which Sydneysiders take in the Opera House. Yes, they remarked on the massive stones and magnificent buildings, but there was more to their pride than this. This was God's house, a visible expression of their special relationship with God. The temple represented their identity as God's chosen people. So Jesus' response to his disciples would have been shocking and upsetting. Surely the temple won't be destroyed again! What a terrible thought! If it is destroyed, what will happen to our nation?

**What the Disciples Wanted to Know** (13:3-4) Four of Jesus' disciples wait for an opportunity to speak privately to Jesus, and ask him the questions which his shocking words have brought to mind. Obviously they want to hear more about the temple itself, but the plural "these things" suggests that this is not all they want to know. We get a clearer idea of what they are asking if we look at Matthew's more detailed summary of their questions (24:3): *"Tell us," they said, "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"* It seems that the disciples have assumed that these events will come together. This is understandable if we appreciate what the temple meant to them, and how significant they thought it was in God's plans. But in fact they want to know about two distinct times. Jerusalem fell to the Romans in 70 AD and the temple was destroyed. In some ways this event, which involved great violence and suffering, foreshadowed even greater events to come. But we are still waiting for Christ's return and the end of human history. This complicates our interpretation of the rest of Mark 13. There are parts which are clearly about the End, parts which are clearly about the fall of Jerusalem and parts where it is hard to be sure which is the subject. I have decided to focus on those parts which are most clearly relevant to us, as people for whom the fall of Jerusalem is in the distant past but the return of Christ is still in the future. I have decided to focus on what we need to know, rather than what the disciples wanted to know.

**What We Need to Know (1): Waiting for the End** (13:5-11) Jesus' first response to their questions is to warn them against deceivers. **Read vv.5-8.** Jesus tells them, and tells us, to be careful when people claim to be Jesus come back, and when others claim to be able to read historical events with such certainty that they know exactly when Jesus will return. History tells us that there have indeed been such people, and that some Christians have been deceived. History also confirms Jesus' warning that wars and uprisings and earthquakes and famines are not reliable indicators of the End. Jesus' next words tell his disciples how to live in a troubled world while they wait for his return. **Read vv.9-11.** Some of the details here apply specifically to the very early years of the church (synagogues and governors), but much is applicable to Jesus' disciples throughout human history. The gospel will go on being preached until Jesus returns, and we have a part in that. For many Christians, that has meant and will mean, severe persecution. But for all Christians this means that we need not worry when we play some part in the proclamation of the gospel and face some measure of opposition. We don't need to be strong enough or clever enough to deal with this, because the Holy Spirit will give us words to say.

**What We Need to Know (2): Christ's Return Unmistakable** (13:24-27) Some of the deceivers against whom Jesus warned have predicted the time of his return. When they have been disappointed, some have revised their prediction. But others have claimed that Jesus has indeed returned, but those less enlightened than them have failed to see it. Jesus guards us against this deception by describing the dramatic character of the end times and of his own return. **Read vv.24-27.** We're not going to miss it. These will be uniquely dramatic events, and Jesus will return as the glorious Son of Man. And Jesus will send his angels to gather his elect, his chosen people – none will be forgotten. We don't need to know all the details about the end times, but we do need to know, and we do know, where history is headed. It is headed for God's wonderful ending, and we should live in the light of that knowledge. We should rejoice in that knowledge, and anticipate what God will do.

**What We Need to Know (3): We Need to be Ready** (13:32-37) The final section of this chapter begins with an emphatic negative statement. **Read v.32.** Jesus could not have been more emphatic than this. Jesus is very clear about our not knowing when he will return. He is also clear about what we should do about not knowing. **Read vv.33-37.** Note Jesus' repetition of similar words for what his disciples are to do: they are to "be on guard" and "be alert" (v.33); they are to "keep watch" (v.34); they are to "keep watch" (v.35); they are to "watch" (v.37). There are three similar words in Greek, but the third of these is used on the last three occasions –

it is the word *grēgoreō*, which means to stay awake, or keep watch or be alert. Its meaning here is made clear by Jesus' use of the illustration of the owner of a house going away and putting his servants in charge. They do not know when he will return, so they have got to be ready all the time. They are to be alert by serving him faithfully all the time. This is what Jesus wants of us. We don't need to know the timing of his return, or the timing of our individual deaths, if we serve him faithfully at all times.

**Conclusion** We don't need to know all the details about Christ's return, including its exact timing. We need to know that everything is in God's hands, and that Jesus will return triumphantly at God's chosen time. And we need to be ready at all times. We need to serve Jesus Christ faithfully at all times, so that it is not important when he comes, or when the time comes for us to come into his presence.