

# Twenty Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

**“BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU WISH FOR  
BE FAITHFUL IN WHOM YOU ARE GRANTED”**

**Mark 13:1-8**

**24th Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 28)**

**Analysis by James Squire**

1As he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, “Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!” 2Then Jesus asked him, “Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.” 3When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately, 4“Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?” 5Then Jesus began to say to them, “Beware that no one leads you astray. 6Many will come in my name and say, ‘I am he!’ and they will lead many astray. 7When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. 8For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birth pangs.”

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**DIAGNOSIS: Dying for a Future**

**Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem)** : *Our Frustrated Ambitions*

Jesus really showed those mean temple authorities who's boss, didn't he? He could blow them all away and make that temple his. Think of all the power he could wield, all the good he could do! And think of how thrilling it would be to be officers in his court! While we are sizing up the possibilities, Jesus is talking crazy talk about the temple and the surrounding buildings crumbling to the ground. Anarchist! What a waste. But, okay, he's our leader. So, leader, what's the plan now? When is it going to happen? What signs should we look for? We need to prepare. "Prepare to be deceived and led astray," says Jesus. Many will offer to answer your questions, and their signs will be compelling. Oh, don't worry, those signs will happen, but what they will call the end is actually the beginning. Beware your lust for thrilling endings. It will lead you astray.

### **Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Gullible for Fool's Gold***

Why are we so susceptible to being led astray? Because our faith is built on a weak foundation. One minute we are excited about regime change, the next we get excited about witnessing the end of civilization. We hang with Jesus, not because we are devoted to him, but because he seems to know something about the future which, we believe, is the true key to our happiness. To us, Jesus is another Hal Lindsey, continually leaving us hanging. He warns us about the other voices we will encounter? But why should we trust Jesus?! Give us a reason. Why is he so aloof, brushing aside our questions instead of answering them straight up? But then, it's not really Jesus himself that we trust in. We are not his disciples; we're more like groupies, craving access to his vault of secrets. That is where our trust lies.

### **Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Sold Down the River***

But our misplaced trust is also our destruction. We will find that vault of secrets, only to discover that it is nothing but lies. We will bypass the true treasure—Jesus—and settle for our

own destruction. The vault of secrets cannot save us. Simply knowing what will happen in the future is not enough if what will happen is something we cannot control. Amidst the stories of the early Christian martyrs are stories of martyr-wannabes who craved the spotlight so much they sought it out. Invariably when they found it, it was too much for them to handle on their own (which is what happens when we leave Christ behind). Be careful what you wish for.

## **PROGNOSIS: Living from the Past**

**Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution)** : *Christ Brings the Future to Us*

Before we get what we wish for, Jesus accepts what even he never wished for: a criminal's execution. When we disowned him, we disowned our own sin as well, but this fits right into God's plan. It was too much for us to bear, which is exactly why Jesus was sent. He does for us what we cannot do ourselves: pays the ultimate price on our behalf. Jesus does much more—and much better—than clueing us in on the future. He changes our future radically, and in ways that future voices (perhaps even some in the community Mark was writing to) will try to pervert. Jesus is our future, not the destruction he referred to that day outside the Temple. So-called prophecies are not our salvation. Christ's death on the cross and his rising from the tomb are our salvation, and when he emerges from that tomb, he waits for us in Galilee. He does not leave us behind.

**Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution)** : *Healed by Advent*

Jesus' gift of salvation always overshadows whatever lesser things we would wish for in salvation. We were stressed out about being prepared for our future; Jesus healed our future. But just for good measure, Jesus authored our future where no one would think to look for it: in his and our past, right there

on that tree outside of Jerusalem. Dr. Bob Bertram, of blessed memory, once likened our baptism to the peculiar notion of a boat captain navigating by looking backward instead of forward. As strange as this sounds, for the sake of our human frailty, our future is now much more secure, anchored solidly in an event fulfilled and recorded in history, than it could ever be simply by us being able to glimpse ahead of time. Everything that can still happen to us is already engulfed in that cosmic event. No apocalypse or missed rapture or anti-Christ can separate us from the love in God in Christ Jesus and his salvation, won for us that day on Golgotha. This is a future we can trust.

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Fulfilled and Giving to Others***

This is also a future we can live in, like that boat captain. Instead of being obsessed with what's ahead, waiting on that next apocalyptic utterance, we focus on the cross, which we can take with us wherever we go. It's not the wood or the nails (long since decayed), but rather what happened there that anchors us in the midst of whatever situation we walk in today. Freed as we are of obsessing over our own fate, we bring Christ's cross to bear on those who are still haunted by their unknown futures. The world is obsessed with the apocalypse these days, so there are bound to be plenty of people who can identify with this story from Mark. Furthermore, there are loads of false messiahs out there offering up the very kind of answers Jesus warns us against. We can offer the certain truth of Christ's victory for us as an antidote for the tension-filled predictions of the world's Hal Lindseys. After all, prophecy is not about predicting the future, it is about speaking the truth of God to the present, and we are armed with that Truth in the person of Jesus Christ.