

Future-proof

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[0 : 00] Okay, please turn back to Mark chapter 13. My apologies. I was planning to preach on Sam 16, but for different reasons, I'm going to be in Mark 13, which is, we're doing a series in East Valley and Mark.

So this is where we were this morning. And I was trying to calculate, would anybody from East Valley be here tonight? And I thought all the people who were on kids search would be here, but I think there's at least one person who wasn't, so I do apologize to the person who will hear me twice on the same subject.

However, I want us to start by thinking about this. I think this is a really, really helpful and a really relevant passage, though a rather huge one. And you read this kind of chapter and it blows your mind a little bit with the complexity and the language, the kind of themes that it takes off with.

But I want to begin by thinking about something I find really fascinating and that is future proofing. And I think we all do this in different ways.

I think you do, you may not know what I'm talking about, but I think we do. Here's a definition. Future proofing is the process of anticipating the future and developing methods of minimizing the effects of shocks and stresses of future events.

[1 : 13] Rather a mouthful, but basically to say, though we do this all the time in different ways, we try and look at what may happen in the future, so we anticipate stresses, traumas, problems, and we try and find a way to protect against them.

Now, you may do that with technology, you can do that in business, you can do that in medical industry, we can do that personally with our own lives because the thought of something going wrong isn't good.

So I wonder if you're conscious of doing this, future proofing, anticipating what may happen in your life and trying to protect against it. And I think this is significant because I think I'm pretty convinced at the moment that our society is going through, maybe it always is, but we're going through a pretty huge upheaval and at a societal level, we're trying to work out how we can future proof against the mega disasters that are coming our way.

Whichever government you fear the most, how can we future proof against this bunch of rogues who are gonna come and take us over, whichever side they may be for you? How can we future proof against the obvious climate issues that people are talking about all the time?

Economic meltdown, relational meltdown at a personal level. So whatever it is for you, you will look at news anywhere in the world and see many problems and many proposed solutions to deal with the problems.

[2 : 41] Here's the thing though, I think for many people this is such a big issue because we don't know where history is going. How can we know?

We don't have an encyclopedic knowledge of history, we don't have the ability to grasp, take hold of and manipulate the future. It's just not within our power, it's not within my power, I don't think it's within your power either.

So often, and another side of this is that people want to insulate themselves against trouble, but they also want to become something on their own terms I don't know how I can take hold of the future and make it what I want it to be, but what I will do is each day I get up, be the best human being I can be, great.

But we just can't protect ourselves against all the ways in which we're thwarted becoming who we want to be. So that's a whole other issue really.

But with all that is just the issue of where is history going and isn't it frightening not knowing? If life is just life and if we're here kind of by accident and we've got to just make the best of it.

[3 : 52] And I read one guy when I was thinking about this and he said this, he said this, and I think this applies to you tonight if you're a Christian, but also if you're not and to your friends who are not, I think it applies to people.

That history is heading somewhere and means something does resonate with us deep down. In other words, we're just not content saying, well, you know, we just kind of evolved and history is evolving and that's fine and we'll just end up somewhere and then fine.

It doesn't sit well with us, does it? You don't like that at a personal level. You feel invested with significance. So you take steps to live accordingly. And I think as a society we do that also.

And in the kind of swamp of wondering how to deal with life and what's gonna happen and isn't it also terrifying, Jesus speaks in a passage like this one and it's absolutely devastating.

It's devastating if you're not a believer because he shakes our world. He shakes everything about who we think we are and what we think is going on. And it's comforting as well as incredibly challenging if you're a believer because what he wants to say to you is, have you forgotten that I am the Lord of history?

[5 : 14] But in amongst everything that's going on, nothing surprises me. I know about that and this and that and you. I know I am working all of these things out.

So Jesus speaks in this passage about future events, okay? And he's speaking to ordinary men, his disciples and Jesus is of course by this point in Mark moving forward and firmly towards the cross, that moment where he will lay down his life so that we may trust in him.

And a lot of Mark's gospel is about identity, who is Jesus, this chapter helps us with that. But a lot of Mark's gospel is also about discipleship. Okay, if you're gonna trust in me, what will that look like?

And Jesus here blows his disciples' minds and starts telling them pretty radical things about future. And there are two things going on here I want to suggest.

Now some people will look at the chapter and see it as one big thing, but I don't think so, I think there are two things that are going on here. One in their immediate future, which Jesus wants to confront them with, which is really, really scary, but he wants to confront them with.

[6 : 28] And then the second thing is a future, future thing that is coming for them. Now I want us just to pick out from these two different sections, and we're not going to go into mega detail about everything that's going on here, but I think it's a really, really incredibly helpful chapter when you consider the future, because, and here's the point, it changes the way that you live tonight and tomorrow morning and this week and all of your life.

It changes everything about how you actually go about living your life when you understand what Jesus is saying here. So I said there was two things. Here's the first thing, okay? Jesus wants to tell them about a cataclysmic event that will happen within the kind of immediate future of the Jewish people, and it is the end of an era.

And the end of the era that is coming about is to do with the destruction of a temple and if you like the sacking of Jerusalem. Let's pick out a few verses.

So if you've got a Bible with me, Mark 13, verse one and two, they're in the temple. So Jesus is with his people in the place that is the central event, if you like, the place where the action happens and their religion, and it's the place where God dwells with his people.

As he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said, look, teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings. And Jesus said to him, do you see these great buildings? There will not be one left here, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.

[8 : 08] Now, I don't know how bothered you are when we renovate old buildings. Renovating old buildings can be upsetting because we like them. Destroying old buildings can be very upsetting.

But for these people, for Jesus to say, yeah, the temple, the temple that we were just in, yeah, that's gonna be flattened. That's just gonna be gone. That's completely devastating for them to hear that.

Because this is the place that God wanted, a place where he could dwell and be with his people, where they could gather and come together and worship him and lift up his name. So for Jesus to start talking about throwing, the stones being thrown down, really, really, really stresses them out.

And so, of course, they come to him, and this happens often in Mark, and they say, Jesus, tell us more. So verse three, as he sat on the Mount of Olives, opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately, when?

When's it gonna happen? So it may well be that they were thinking, well, how can we deal with this? How can we manage the situation? So what Jesus wants to say to them at this point, and notice that he doesn't say, yeah, there's a bad thing potentially, but I'll fix it.

[9 : 18] It's okay. Don't you worry too much. I'll fix it. I'll sort it. I'll make the problem go away. He's confronting them square between the eyes with the reality of the fact that this horrible thing is gonna happen, and he's not gonna intervene and change it.

He's relating something in verse, if we go down to verse 14, he's relating to something that they would have have a kind of resonance of in their understanding of biblical truth.

Remember, these are people schooled in the scriptures that they would have had up until this point. Jesus has been speaking generally, I read from verses one through three, and then he goes on to speak in general terms about this cataclysmic event that's coming.

So he gives them warnings, he gives them encouragements, he gives them directions, and we get to verse 14, and he says something specific, okay? And again, for these people, hearing this language that he uses, it would have resonated with them.

They would have kind of picked up on this, and understood what he was talking about. So he says in verse 14, but when you see the abomination of desolation, standing where he ought not to, let the reader understand, then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.

[10 : 38] Now, as I said, we could go into a lot more detail tonight, we could, but I won't. But this is one of two significant references which pick up from the book of Daniel.

The second half of the book of Daniel has a lot of prophecy in it, a lot of the same kind of language, which is broadly speaking apocalyptic, very dramatic, hard to understand in many ways.

But again, using the kinds of phrases that people steeped and schooled in the scriptures would have understood. And in the book of Daniel, it talks also about an abomination that causes desolation.

And the thing is that in Jewish history, after Daniel, so if you think between the book of Daniel and this time now when Jesus is speaking, something awful did happen at the center of Jewish worship, where a man who set himself up as a ruler did offer a terribly offensive sacrifice and ruled terribly the Jewish people.

And there was a great offense, there was a great offense to those people, again, without going into all the details. But Jesus is here speaking, using the same language, the abomination of desolation, about something that's still to happen.

[11 : 56] So he's speaking about another thing, something else that's gonna happen, that's gonna be a devastatingly offensive thing for the people and in their religious life.

And not long, I think after the writing of Mark, the Jewish people were crushed by the Romans and the temple was desecrated and if you like, the second offense, this abomination that causes desolation happens again.

Religious life as they knew it, the temple is the center of worship, as they knew it, again, was broken to pieces. And Jesus' prophecy here comes true.

So, I said, in all of the language, in all of the slightly dramatic and confusing language that's used here, Jesus is speaking to his people about an immediate thing.

He wants them to set up and take notice because something very dramatic is gonna happen. So here's just a few things to notice about this. One, it's incredibly traumatic, but he wants them to have realistic expectations.

[13 : 10] So, the Bible never speaks to you just to kind of soothe you, lull you, make you feel like things are just fine.

No worries, everything's gonna be all right. Just not like that because that's not honest. Jesus is speaking here about the reality of what was gonna happen within the providential work of God, within his purposes.

Very traumatic, very realistic. If you look at verse 15, let the one who's on the housetop not go down and enter his house to take anything out.

I was using the example this morning, if you're in a public place and they welcome you to that public place if you're visiting somewhere and they give you the fire rags, don't they? You know, if you hear the fire alarm, don't go back for your stuff.

Don't go back and pick up your bag or your favorite jacket, get out, because it's dangerous. And Jesus is kind of saying here, you know when this happens? Don't stop, don't get out.

[14 : 13] You're gonna want to get out. It's gonna be awful. And he uses other language, very poignant language about nursing mothers. So Jesus knows about devastating events that are devastating for human beings.

He knows about them all. And they are within the providential purposes of God. God is working through these things and he knows and he has compassion.

But he says to them, don't be swerved, don't give up. Because he says if you take verse 11, verse 11, for example, he's speaking again in this more general first section about when people try and throw them off the path, confuse them, get them to follow somebody else rather than him, he says, when they bring you to trial and deliver you over, don't be anxious beforehand what you're gonna say, but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it's not you who speak but the Holy Spirit.

In other words, he's reassuring them with the fact that when they face trial and opposition, the Holy Spirit is with them. They're not left, they're not abandoned.

He's with them through this. So this is gonna be traumatic and violent, have realistic expectations. They must have faithfulness under stress and violence.

[15 : 38] And thirdly, hope because there will come a new era of gospel proclamation. Now remember how upsetting this is for his disciples, the temple, they're gonna break the temple.

We can't believe it. This must be the end, because this is what they knew. This was the way, this was the way they were to live their lives in worship. And yet Jesus isn't saying this is gonna be the end of all things because he talks in verse 10 about gospel proclamation.

Gospel proclamation, good news. In amongst all this trauma, and the gospel must be preached. And then it's the following verse 11 that he says to them, and you be my witnesses.

You say whatever is given to you by the Holy Spirit. So it's a really distinct dramatic, remarkable encapsulation of a moment in time that Jesus wants to hold out to the people that are listening to him, to his friends.

How can we take a hold of this? Well, remember that it happened. But through this, and in the days that followed it, God birthed his church.

[16 : 50] God brought many people to faith. He spread his people even through persecution into different lands, where the message of Jesus Christ took on like a fire and burned in people's hearts and spread rapidly.

And people couldn't stop it. And people have never been able to stop it. Governments, all kinds of people that I talked about here. And Jesus knew what would happen to all of these people who experienced this.

And they're all his people. And even in the trauma, he was holding them. And he cares for them and he knows them. And there are people now who experience as blunt a trauma as this for believing.

So you and I must never forget them. The fact that there are people throughout the world who experienced this, who are separated from their loved ones, who are betrayed, talks about betrayal, family betrayal, doesn't it?

People are scared of the authorities, so they betray family members. Yeah, my answer, Christian. Utterly traumatic and yet known to Jesus.

[18 : 01] And you, even the pressure that you feel at odds with society, which is against Jesus. It's not without Jesus' knowledge. When you are to speak in the court of public opinion, not in the actual court, he is with you.

Say the words that he gives you to speak, be faithful. So the same things apply, be realistic about the path that is ahead of you. Understand that opposition is prophesied by Jesus himself.

And remember as well, remember that if you know anything about John's gospel, if you don't read it, it's wonderful to read in John chapter 17, Jesus' praise for his disciples because he knows what's coming.

He has deep love for his people. He's not throwing you off the deep end when he sends you out into life, owning his name. He's with you. And he knows history.

It's his. It's not outside of his control. So there's a slightly longer, we'll be short with the second half. There is end of an era, okay?

[19 : 08] The trauma that's gonna face the Jewish people, what seems like just devastating end of time. How can things possibly carry on? But then the second half of the chapter, Jesus goes on and he doesn't leave it there.

And he speaks, so I think is about a future future time. Another event, which is in many ways, not as horribly traumatic for the people, but which is more mega, if you like, because he speaks about the time when he will return.

So if the first was about the end of an era, the second, we're gonna think about the return of the king to borrow a phrase. Jesus describes from the second half onwards, from verse 24 onwards, another thing.

But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light. And the stars will be falling from heaven and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

[20 : 19] Now, there's a big picture, if ever you saw one. Jesus is speaking here about an event of cosmic significance. Let me just pick out a few things about this. And the first is language.

Again, I want to go back to this. The kind of language that Jesus is using here seems pretty grand to us, a little bit impenetrable. I don't even make sense of it.

But again, for the people that he's speaking to, this would have resonated with them. They would have heard the kind of language that in their understanding of the Scriptures would have described the actions of God.

What happens when God acts in a big way? Because they understood that God was the Lord of the world, the Creator of the universe. He was the one who moved the starry heavens, who held the universe in the palm of his hands.

They had a very clear understanding of that. To hear somebody speak about in that day would also have resonated with them. The Old Testament, if you look through the Old Testament, you hear mentioned in the prophets of, in that day I will, says the Lord.

[21 : 23] An understanding they would have of a future time when the Lord would act decisively in human history. And so here we get, again, this kind of resonance in those days after that tribulation, and then this kind of dramatic language about cosmic events.

And here Jesus is speaking about a time as he then goes on to draw attention to himself as the Son of Man, where it will be evident to everybody.

Nobody will be able to look the other way. Nobody will be able to deny. Nobody will be able to thwart the coming again of the Son, Jesus Christ revealed as King and as Lord of all.

And so this dramatic language that we get here speaks about something that should mean a lot to you. Don't, again, don't live your daily life as if we don't know where we're going and we just hope it'll be all right in the end.

Even as Christians sometimes, believing in Jesus Christ, we can live as if it's either all up to us to work out and maybe hopefully God will kind of fix things a little bit. But here we read about a day when Jesus Christ will return.

[22 : 41] So the language here points to this for our encouragement. And it's for the encouragement of the people who are hearing this, think about this. Jesus has been speaking to his disciples.

What's he been telling them? Huge trauma is coming your way. And then he speaks about this future event where this mass revelation of this glorious figure who will come and what will he do?

It speaks about how his angels, verse 27, he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven. Wow.

So we're frightened because Jesus has just told us that the temple's gonna be knocked down and we're gonna be betrayed and there's gonna be violence and there's gonna be earthquakes. And then he says, but there's gonna be a time when I'm gonna send my angels to come get you, them, the future people.

And from all over the ends of the earth, because remember that the gospel has to be preached far and wide. So this is for you as well. This is for you to understand as well because you and I now live in this age, the in-between time, the time when the gospel is to be preached before the time when the Son of Man will be revealed.

[23 : 57] So this dramatic language, which leads us to think about this figure, the Son of Man. Now this again, again, I'm not gonna go into it, but this is also a reference to Daniel and Daniel, we get this phrase, the Son of Man.

And it speaks about him coming on the clouds and great reverence and all being given to him, power and authority. And Jesus, Jesus is very, very self-aware.

I think, again, thinking about our society, people will sometimes try to say to you that what happened with Jesus was, well, you had this guy who was a good guy, and events kind of overtook him a little bit and there was a bit, everybody got a bit of a collective rush of blood to the head, and they ended up thinking he was something more than he really was.

And hey, Presto, we've got this kind of accumulated, developed history of somebody who people think is divine somehow. But actually, Jesus is very self-aware and very deliberate in what he says.

And all through Mark's Gospel, he consistently confronts people with the reality of who he is. The one who can do things that nobody else can do. The authoritative teacher, the one who is divine, the one who is authoritative, and the one who holds history in the palm of his hand.

[25 : 15] And know again that that is Jesus your Lord if you believe in him. He is awesome. He is awesome.

Nobody can stop him. Okay, but when? When? We all want to know when. The disciples wanted to know when the temple was gonna get broken.

When, Jesus? Jesus says, no, not when. Don't ask me that. Ask me how you should live in the light of the fact that this is gonna happen. And that's what we really need to kind of end on and push home just as we come to the conclusion of this chapter.

When's it gonna happen? Well, Jesus says, no, don't think about when. Think about how you're gonna live with this reality. If this is true, like I said earlier, this changes everything about the way you live tonight tomorrow morning.

So we get to the end of the passage and I'm just gonna move on a little bit. We get to verse 32. And Jesus says, but concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, nor the Son, but only the Father.

[26 : 33] Okay, well, you may say, well, that's not very helpful, Jesus. People want to know when. And Jesus says, you should ask yourself, how you are to live?

And that's what he goes on to describe. And it's actually what he's been saying through the whole chapter, all the way through the chapter, he's been confronting the disciples with hard truths that they don't wanna hear, but he's been saying to them, be faithful, be realistic.

Hold fast to my name. Don't be afraid, don't be swerved off the path, all the way through the chapter. And so when we get to this point, be on guard, keep awake.

For you don't know when the time will come. A couple of people I read on this, one man says, the doctrine of the second coming has a moral goal.

It's designed to provoke action more than contemplation. So it's okay to think about this and to wonder about it and to be amazed by it, but it should change the way you live. It should change the way you live.

[27 : 34] Another person says, follower, Jesus's followers are to go on with their mission. That's really what this is about. This is what Jesus is trying to stimulate in the people who hear him.

They should go on with their mission, preaching, living for the gospel, ready for their master at any time, so that he will find them on the job. So that's the other thing about this. Just to bring this full circle, we started off by thinking about the future and about the tyranny of worry.

You know, how is it gonna work out? We don't know. You can manage some things in your life, but not everything, and you certainly can't manage world history. So we should do our bit. We should look after the world and we should try to be wise in the way that we live.

But we don't know everything, but we do know that the Lord is holding history in the palm of His hand and that He knows exactly what is going on. And we know that if we believe that, then He wants your life to be invested with the significance of being a disciple.

That means He's given to you the calling of being somebody who becomes like Jesus, who lives as a testimony to the fact that Jesus is Lord, who's able to warn people that if they don't hear something of Him, that they don't hear of His Word, if they don't come to see Him for who He really is, then they face the prospect of an eternity cast away from His presence.

[29 : 01] And so Jesus goes on to tell this story. It's like a man going on a journey when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake.

The thing is, if you have a job and you have a boss, and the boss says, hey, I've got to go on a business trip for three days, but we've got a really, really significant deadline. Could you be in charge of it? You say, sure, no problem.

And then you spend two and three quarter days looking at Facebook. That's not a good way to live. It's not sensible, and it's not fulfilling.

It's a complete waste of time, and it makes a mockery of the task that you've been given. Now, we should see the time that we've been given now as the greatest privilege, the greatest privilege.

And I want to say to you tonight as well that if you don't know Jesus as Lord, if you're not trusting Him, then you need to know Him as the one who holds history in the palm of His hand and who is the way of the truth in the life, that's the way He describes Himself.

[30 : 06] But also to know Him is to have your life invested. Every moment of your life invested with significance because your life becomes about living in the knowledge of Him as King, which is how He should be known.

It means also that your anxiety about life and future events is put in its right place. And it means that your daily contribution to society, to Christian living, to the Christian family, to witnessing and telling people about the light of the world is something which you've been given, which is full of significance and a great blessing.

And so just to kind of bring it to a close, I think a chapter like this, a huge chapter like this, with all of the language which can be confusing, nevertheless, speaks to us about a wonderful, wonderful Savior who wants to counsel you and comfort you, who wants to encourage you to be realistic, but who wants to say to you that in His absence, before He comes again, He will be with you and He has sent the Holy Spirit to be with you in all of the moments of your life, where you have opportunity to live as His disciples.

All the moments of your life where you live as His disciples. And that is no small thing. That is no small thing.

I'm gonna pray now and just bring that to a close and ask that the Lord will help us to face up to that. Sometimes we don't want to see the cost of following Him, but let me pray just now.

[31 : 54] Father, we want to pray tonight that you would reveal yourself to us, help us to see you for who you really are, and we pray that we would see your Son, Lord Jesus, as the great, compassionate, humble, servant-hearted King who came and gave Himself and who will one day be revealed in all His glory and splendour.

We look forward to that, Lord Jesus, we pray, come again. And in the meantime, please help us not to hide ourselves under a rock, to hide away the light that we have.

If we don't know you as Lord, then please break through into our hearts and reveal yourself to us tonight. And may we live for you, we pray, in Jesus' name, amen.