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Preacher: Derek Lamont

[0 : 00] I want this morning just for a little while to turn back to the last time in the near future anyway, God willing to Mark's Gospel. We've taken, I suppose in some ways it seems like an age to get through this but it's not really that long and we've actually been doing it quite quickly because we wanted to get across the fact that Mark in a rotis gospel really, I don't know if he wrote it quickly but the intention was he was just getting across a whole lot of information quickly about Jesus. He wanted people to know about Jesus and he doesn't spend long on any story. He's moving quickly, he's moving passionately through towards the last week, the passion week and to the death and resurrection of Jesus. And I hope we try to convey that a little bit by taking chunks of the book, the chapters at a time and not going into each chapter in much detail and we'll be doing the same today. But over these last weeks and any time you've read Mark's Gospel, any time you've looked at it, you'd understand and you'd know that Jesus says lots of things.

He says lots of things in Mark's Gospel and indeed in the Bible, he says you know that you're to love God, he says you're to love your neighbour, yourself, he's just turning the other cheek, you're to forgive, he's to say not to be afraid, he says follow me.

And we loved the bits when he went into the temple and he gave a really hard time to the religious leaders, we liked that, we liked the exposed hypocrisy and the people that thought they were proud and important and religious and good and moral and upright, he absolutely slammed. He gave them the hardest time and we liked that, we loved that because we liked to think other people are hypocritical, we're not quite so keen if the light of Jesus Christ kind of shines into our own hearts but we do, we loved when Jesus said these things and he says of course lots more in the Gospel and that's good and that's significant. And in verse 31 of this chapter 13 he says, look heaven and earth will pass away, the world will pass away, things will change, he says but my words will never pass away. So he's giving himself this amazing significance and authority which very few people will give to him today. You'll say look heaven's important, earth's really important, your life is important, there's amazing structures in this world, both personal relationships and families and communications and even physical structures. He says all of that is going to pass away, he says my words, because I'm living and because I'm eternal, they will never pass away. And so his words are significant and important, that's why we spend so much time thinking about them, there's a great permanence about what he has said, so important that he calls himself in John 1 the word, the one who communicates, the one who's something significant and important to tell. And therefore his words that we've looked at are hugely significant but often isn't it true in our lives, it might not be true, it might be true for the hour you're here but it might not be true for the hour you're here but for the rest of our lives so often it is even either for us or for people we know, he's the last person that we listen to, he's the last person whose words we think about and he's the last person whose words we take as significant and important because we don't really think that they are words which will never pass away. But that by faith as Christians we've come to that place where at least theoretically we believe that, even if practically sometimes we don't put it into practice. But I like to think about his words in this chapter, what he's saying here and what he speaks about is the future and he speaks about the future from his time and moving right forward till the end of time and I think lots of people are fascinated by the future, there's lots of films about the future, there's lots of apocalyptic type films about how everything's going to end but we're all interested, we would all be interested if we thought someone could tell us about our future, maybe not, maybe it's too scary a thing to think about our future, maybe we would shy away if someone could say hey, come here, I know what your next five years are going to, I know exactly what's going to happen in your next five years, would you go for it? Would you listen if you were guaranteed it was true? Would you want to know? Well I don't know if we would, would we? Maybe sometimes we would, maybe sometimes we wouldn't, whatever would happen would be shocked by a guarantee, it's not going to be what we expect, all of our next five years will probably not be what we expect them to be. But Jesus here is speaking about the future and it's a fascinating future that he speaks about and so it kind of should interest us, most of we're not Christians, it should interest us because he's speaking into today, into our lives as it were, because he's speaking from his future into our lives and beyond our lives because the world is still on the go. And basically what he's speaking of and this is a complicated, difficult chapter, I'm not going to go into it in any kind of depth, just going to give a quick overview, is he's really pointing to the trajectory

the world is taking with God at the centre, from his perspective, from his perspective of God's son is the one who knows the end from the beginning, the eternal God, he's giving his future trajectory, kind of prophetic in other words, he's saying what is going to happen in very general terms in the future and basically he's saying I'm here, I'm just about to go to the cross and he says there's going to be a time in between then and me coming back finally to bring ultimate justice into the world. The cross is about his justice, it's about how he deals with the problem of sin and rebellion and evil and wickedness in the world but it's not a final, ultimate, completely final act because he will return to bring in ultimate justice to be the judge of humanity and when he comes again the judgement will be on his terms. We all like to judge ourselves and we like to do, particularly in comparison with other people, but he'll be bringing judgement on the basis of what he's done on the cross, what it reveals about what he thinks about our characters and our need and our relationship with him and he will also judge finally on our response to

Jesus Christ and the judgement that he brings on our lives is always on his standard. I think that's really important just to think about, it's not I'm as good as the bloke next door, I'm better than the woman two doors down but it's on his standard on that day and that's one of divine perfection. So it's speaking into our futures and speaking about his return, so we can either do one of two things, we can either face up to at least the claim that he makes, he's making this claim, we can face up to that claim and take it seriously and think about possibly the consequences it might have in our lives, both as Christians because if we know a future that's coming and a perspective that he wants us to think about then we need to think about that as Christians and if we're not Christians we need to think about that as well, face up to that claim that he makes, take it seriously, examine it and think about the consequences it might have for you in your life and for me in mind or you have the other option, you can ignore it, you can switch off, you can suppress that knowledge or that truth, you can reject it and you're absolutely free and absolutely open to reject what Jesus claims to say, but in doing so you need to think about who Jesus is and his claims and you need to follow it right through and say he's not worth accepting because he's a nutcase or he is worth considering because of who he claimed to be, but if you do choose to reject

[8 : 47] Jesus Christ and his claims then you also need to think about the alternative that you choose to live by and is it a thoughtful alternative?

Is it one that is justifiable? Is it one that's going to deal with some of the bigger issues of the world in which we live but also our personal needs for forgiveness and grace and what its answer is to our own death and even to the future?

So there's lots of things that I hope that Jesus encourages us to think about, at least think about when we come to his word, you know his words will never pass away so I want us to think about them just for a few minutes.

So he's coming back, that's what he's saying, he's been once, nobody denies that Jesus has been once unless they're complete fruit cakes and he's really been, he's come, he's claimed that he came for a particular reason to live, to die on the cross, to be raised again for our salvation, he claimed to be that and now he's claiming in this amazing chapter that he will come once again to be the judge of all the earth and to bring heaven and earth which will pass away and introduce a new creation.

What happens in the meantime? So what's happening Jesus says between the cross and his second coming and we are here, we're in this time okay, we're in the time between the cross and the second coming.

[10 : 13] Well what does he say? Well he says during that time there will be religious nutters, verse 6 he says that there will be people, many come in my name and say I am he and will deceive many.

Can a religious people, leaders possibly, people who are completely deceived, who say they're Jesus Christ, who say that they know when the end of the world is going to come, who bunker down and get ready for it and then the day passes and they say well we've got the day a little bit wrong somewhere along the line and people who just claim things that simply set them apart as being religious nut cases and Jesus says that will happen.

These kind of people will be around, who will deceive many, who do not have the truth and who do not speak the truth and who do not believe in Jesus, ultimately in Jesus' own words and he says that is going to happen and we know that happens, we've seen it, we've got it on the internet, we hear about it all the time.

Sometimes it happens from our American brother, sorry, there's quite a lot of folks from the US here, but they tend to claim more divine Jesus type characters and we need to be aware of that, that they will deceive many.

That will also be global upheaval versus 8 and 9, nation will rise against nation, kingdom against kingdom, there will be earthquakes in various places and famines, these are the beginning of birth pangs.

[11 : 47] Global upheaval, we know that, Jesus is saying this is going to happen, there's not a great deal he says that's going to change from before the crucifixion when there were these things to after the crucifixion, there's still going to be wars and rumors of wars and earthquakes and famines and tornadoes and all these things are going to happen and he says that I'm telling you that will be the case and we shouldn't be surprised by that, that's what he says will happen and then he also goes on to say that there will be persecution for Christians.

Verse 9 and onward you must be on your guard, you'll be handed over to local councils, flogged in the synagogues, on account of me you will stand before governors and kings etc, you'll be arrested etc and so on and he's saying that during that time between my first coming and my second coming Christians in greater and lesser degrees in different countries at different times will undergo persecution and sometimes very severe persecution for their faith.

We heard this week there was a guy who spoke at the assembly which was the general assembly which was meeting in here this week and he was speaking about persecution of Christians and they were reckoning there's a hundred million Christians who are suffering persecution that's very different to what we might think we suffer in our lives but nonetheless even in our own society we'll find that more and more we are being isolated, we are being shoved towards the edges of society in terms of influence and significance and the views of traditional Orthodox Christianity are being rubbished so that there will undoubtedly become a time fairly soon when at least in the laws of the land we will undergo persecution if we stick with the teaching of the Bible, persecution of Christians, Jesus says it's going to happen and that's all just between his first second coming and that is what he's teaching and the question for those to whom he was speaking or well no maybe not quite yes to those who were speaking but at least those to whom Mark was writing this the early Christians that

Mark was writing to and to Christians ever since the question is do you believe this trajectory which he tells us what's in between he says he's been once he's coming back again to really to be the book ends of history at the beginning in the middle and at the end do you believe this now it's a difficult thing to believe isn't it it's difficult to think of the future like that and to think of a spiritual future that Jesus is absolutely sovereign and lord over that he's going to come back to govern because it doesn't look like that does it it doesn't look like that in the world we live in it looks a bit more like what he says wars and rumors of wars persecution things aren't going particularly well doesn't look like he saved the world but Jesus knows that we are prone to doubt all the time and he knows it's difficult for us to believe these truths he gifts us faith to believe them we need to ask him for faith but he knows that it's difficult so what he does in this chapter is that he slots in a little section into the chapter which speaks about a different short term future for the people of Judah now this is very important I can I just ask you to concentrate for a minute for this he gives a warning about a very near future disaster that's going to happen in Jerusalem which by the time Mark's gospel was written the readers would be able to look back on and say yes that actually happened and it gives them a sense of that more likely than to believe all the rest of the things he's saying about the future because in verse 14 to kind of verse 20 and a little bit more he talks about something very specific he says when you see the abomination that causes desolation standing but it does not belong let the leader read it understand then let those who are in

Judea flee to the mountains now if he was talking about the end of time there who wouldn't be any point in fleeing to the mountains even if you were in Judea because it's the end of time he's talking about something very specific and he's talking about a really bad event that was going to happen pretty soon in the Middle East and he says he goes on to say in verse 30 I tell you to this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened so there's kind of two prophecies going on here it's a little bit mixed in one of them is about the end of time because he goes on to say no one knows the day in the hour but he also speaks about something very bad happening within the generation who are listening to him and most scholars and historians and biblical commentators believe because it's very clearly paralleled he's speaking about the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 when there was a truly horrific destruction both of the temple and of the city of Jerusalem thousands of people were massacred in the most barbaric way by the advancing Roman armies of the day I think under Caligula and there's a warning within this that Jesus gives for the believers who would follow what he says to flee as I said into the mountains get out of Jerusalem and actually there's a sense in which that is historically at least something that is accepted by historians murder maybe you want to go out William that many it's believed that the commentators would say that many believers in the early church that was in Jerusalem did flee Jerusalem and I listened to this warning before the destruction the terrible destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 and so Jesus gives this little prophecy which came true within the lifetime of the people and within the lifetime of the people who would read Mark's gospel to give them a sense of assurance that the rest of what he was saying would also come to pass so the question it might also be well why is there such a miserable trajectory you know Jesus has come he's come to save the world he's died in the cross he you know he's come to bring new life and forgiveness and hope why is there so much until he comes back so much suffering pain persecution what kind of God is he well why does he leave that being gap with all that suffering and misery going on and the persecution of Christians what's all about why doesn't he come back sooner why doesn't he bring us new heavens and new earth well I think for one thing there's mystery within that

[19 : 02] I don't have the answer to that I don't think God gives the answer to that and there aren't specific answers in the world it's great mystery about the remaining power of evil in the world great mystery about why God has timed things the way he's timed them oh God you're not God he is God and there's things he's chosen to tell us and there's things he chosen not to tell us but I do think there's a massive hint in verse 10 where he says and the gospel must first be preached to all nations the gospel needs to be preached you know he hasn't made us robots he hasn't made us people who just believe because he zaps us he is he wants us to be in a relationship with him he wants us to be in a relationship of love a voluntary relationship of love with him and he wants people to accept the gospel message he doesn't want us to be unwilling conscripts in his army he wants us to love him so he wants the gospel to go out he wants people to have the choice people to live the way they live and see the way they live and come to look for Jesus Christ he wants people to turn to him he wants people to understand his love he wants them to come willingly to see their need he wants them to understand the cross and the extent of his love and the extent of the cost that he paid in order to set us free he wants us to understand that the cross does speak of judgment on himself as he poured out it speaks about his standard of perfection very different from ours but it shows that he loved so much that he was willing to pay the price himself because we couldn't pay it and he wants people to understand that and to come to faith he wants the good news of the gospel to be preached the grace of Jesus Christ he is patient so that we as Christians have an incredibly significant and responsible role to share the gospel not to be silent but to share that good news and to recognise his compassion so with all the kind of maelstrom of trouble and difficulty in the world in which we face the evil the brutality the wickedness that we've seen this week in the news in most horrific terms and we see every week in the news do we? When is the last time there's ever good news on the news? And it's all brutal and it's all so much violence and horror and oppression and poverty that we are completely kind of immune to in so many ways throughout the world and it breaks our hearts in many ways and we don't understand it but he wants his gospel to go out he's patient he doesn't want the end to come until his gospel is preached the good news of his love and grace and he says just trust me you know that's what he says trust me he doesn't say to trust him when we understand every last bit that's easy isn't it? He says just trust me when it looks bad and when it's difficult to understand and when it's counter cultural and when it's a whole different trajectory from which we might consider is the right one. What's our response as we close? Our response is the response that God the Father wanted us to have to Jesus the Son when he spoke remember when when he was in the mountain of transfiguration God says this is my beloved son that's my son whom I love listen to him so listen to him because he says why because my words don't pass away they're significant they're weighty they're big they're important they're strong your life will come and go my life will come and go St. Columbus will come and go

and our generations will come and go my words will never pass away listen to them and he reminds us in this chapter which we really just scanned very briefly the importance of as Christians as being alert you know he says no one knows about that day or they're in verse 32 and in 33 be in your guard be alert you do not know when that time will come so he's told us for a reason he says that I've told you for a reason because I want you to be alert in verse 23 he says that and so be on your guard he says I have told you everything ahead of time so if you don't listen to anything else so you don't remember anything else from the sermon remember that that Jesus says you know be alert because I have told you everything ahead of time I've told the early Christians that there's going to be a terrible destruction in Jerusalem in 70 AD and I'm also telling you that I'm going to return and I'm going to return as judge and please recognize and be on your alert for that know your surroundings know the world in which we live and say well yeah Jesus told us it's going to be like this but it's temporary and recognize as Christians are spiritually our responsibility to be on guard spiritually alert watched a little bit of Forest Gump last night and he goes into the army at one point and he's really alert to always be there to help his friends in their time of need he's not sleeping he's alert and he gets a medal for that and you know spiritually same thing you know we're in a family or an army and we're to look out for one another and warn one another but also be alert to the reality of life around us we're to be spiritually praying listening to him and aware of the need to share the gospel I also gave the whole mission stock this week and one of the statistics that I gave was in Scotland today for today for example only about four percent of Scotland will be in a free church I know there's a lot more churches in that but less than one quarter of a percent of the population in Scotland will be in a free church I know there's a lot of other churches but the percentage probably doesn't rise to more than five percent at the most maybe really really positively you could say eight percent but that's a huge mission field a huge gospel to go with and we've got a great responsibility to be part of that not just to sit back not to be asleep but to be spiritually alert to be prayerful eat and pray come on Wednesday night come for food yes because the food is great but come to pray as well you know sign up for it you're not just on your own as a Christian you're part of the kingdom you're part of a church and we need to pray together because the need is great absolutely great we really need God's involvement in our lives and God's involvement in our church and the only way we can do that is if we pray together there's no point in just abandoning that duty responsibility privilege that is ours so please do consider coming along to pray on Wednesday and also to read his word to listen to what he's saying it's permanent so when we pick up the Bible we're picking up his word you know it shouldn't be that we live our lives not in relationship with him with a closed Bible we should be reading it I'm not nagging I'm just saying that that's the reality enough a loving relationship we communicate we talk with one another and so it is with God we pray to him and we should be reading as we should make a duty a part of our life that we wake up in our day or whenever we do and we open his word

and we read and we listen to what he's saying to us and we become acquainted with it and we know it and we understand it so that we are people who are awake and that we listen to his warnings and that we're not sleeping you know as he says in verse 36 he says you know keep watch you don't know when the owner of the house will come back if he comes suddenly don't let him find you sleeping so spiritually you've got that same picture don't don't be asleep he says when you should be awake now we know there's times where physically humanly speaking it's right it's good to sleep but he's speaking about here when he's using the illustration in the way of where we're sleeping where we shouldn't be sleeping maybe asleep at the wheel or asleep because we're lazy and we can't be bothered getting up you know something really important to do during the day but we just want a long line we pull out the doofy over our heads again and it doesn't matter if we let people down or if we're lazy we just want to sleep when we shouldn't be sleeping or we sleeping because we've got no energy to do the right things because our priorities are doing the wrong things so we're sleeping because we're recovering because our focus is on the wrong things not the right things that's just generally speaking like but spiritually it can be applied as well can't it we're not to be sleeping spiritually when we should be awake we shouldn't be selfish and lazy with our time so we've got time for Christ and for His Kingdom I can't be doing because of my energies are being taken elsewhere my life my future my ambition without Christ no time for him no energy in that level he says watch and respond to me because he says

I have the words of eternal life and I love you and that's great isn't it he's the words of eternal life and we love him but it's a dreadful thing as we said at the very beginning of the service to fall into the hands of the living God who is a consuming fire also and is perfect justice and judgment but he says I've poured all that out on Jesus for you you don't need to face that just to accept my love and serve me because you were made to serve me and that's great good news amen but please consider his words and remember above all that they never pass away okay we're gonna sing another Psalm before we finish