“A Preview of Coming Attractions”

Mark 13:1-4

I find it hard to believe that we are beginning another year. If you are like me, then you will agree that 2015 seemed to go by in a flash. I know that time doesn't speed up or slow down, but it sure feels like it goes by faster the longer that you live. Couple this with the technology and smart devices that we are constantly using, and time gets away from you before you know it. For many of us, a new year brings excitement and challenge. It is an opportunity to start over, to get around to doing some things that you've been putting off. When January rolls around, none of us know what the year will hold for us by the time that December gets here once again. There is an element of uncertainty about the future, for none of us truly knows what lies ahead.

In general, Americans are very interested when it comes to knowing the future. I read where Americans spend nearly a billion dollars annually on consulting psychics, horoscopes, and palm readers. Man has always thought he can predict the future, and has tried his best. In 1870, there was a bishop who came to an Indiana college campus for a denominational conference. During his visit, the bishop heard the president of the college say something that shocked him. “We live in an age of wonders,” said the head of the college. “I believe the day is not far off when men will fly in the skies like birds.” The bishop said, “Sir, you are speaking blasphemy! The Bible tells us that the gift of flight is reserved strictly for the angels.” The bishop’s name was Milton Wright who just so happened to have two sons by the name of Orville and Wilbur. Three decades later, they flew.

Throughout history people have always had a strong desire to know the future, to predict the future, and to know what lies ahead.

The future is not a matter of knowing what—it's about knowing WHO.

The Lord Jesus Christ predicted the future with precision. Jesus Christ is Lord, which means that He is sovereign over the past, present, and future happenings of our lives. An omniscient God knows precisely what lies ahead, and the Bible says that He is history’s architect, and is perfectly orchestrating the circumstances in the universe by bringing history to its intended conclusion.
Isaiah 46:9-10 - “For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done.”

Corrie Ten Boom - “Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God.”

I know One who knows the future and controls the future. Jesus had much to say about the future. In fact, He tells us more about what to anticipate in the future than anyone else. How so?

- Jesus referred to the future often in Scripture

He frequently made reference to future events in parables and extended teaching sections. He spoke of future truth to His disciples and made a point of telling those around Him what they could anticipate in the days ahead.

- Jesus even rebuked people for not knowing about the future

He reprimanded people because they didn’t recognize what was going on all around them. He once rebuked a crowd by saying that while they could read the clouds and tell when it was going to rain, although they could look at the winds blowing through their fields and decide when hot weather was approaching, somehow they were unable to discern the signs of the times. (Luke 12:56)

- Jesus always related future truth to present situations

Whenever Jesus spoke of the future, He always connected it to the present. The prophetic passages of the New Testament are always undergirded with strong admonitions about how we are to live today. True biblical prophecy is practical!

- Jesus revealed the future so we would be confident in Him

Rather than living with constant worry and speculation about the future, we live with confidence in Christ who is in perfect control.

John 16:33 - “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”

No passage in the Bible has perhaps drawn any more interest than the passage known as the Olivet Discourse, which is found in the synoptic gospels of Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21.
It is referred to as such because Jesus delivered this message to His disciples on Olivet, or the Mount of Olives, which is a ridge to the east of Jerusalem overlooking the city. In the Old Testament, the Mount of Olives was the place where King David fled to escape the conspiracy against him by his son Absalom. It is the place where the prophet Ezekiel saw the glory of the Lord according to Ezekiel 11, and according to Zechariah 14 it will also be the place where the Messiah will stand against the nations that come to attack Jerusalem in the last days.

The Mount of Olives was often a place that Jesus went to for prayer and rest and time spent with His twelve disciples.

The message that we find in this passage was prompted by a question the disciples asked Jesus, “When will these things be, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?” The answer Jesus gave them is the longest answer given to any question in Scripture, and it is the longest and most important teaching section by Jesus concerning the subject of eschatology—the last days. Over the centuries, believers have studied these verses with keen interest as Jesus tells His disciples what to anticipate in the days preceding His second coming.

Jesus promised to return for His church. The second coming of Christ is not wishful thinking on the part of those who believe in Him, but rather it is the blessed hope of the church. The return of Jesus for His church is the most wonderful truth of Scripture. The fact that Jesus is coming again is concrete, as Jesus Himself promised.

John 14:3 - “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to Myself, that where I am you may be also.”

Titus 2:11-14 - “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession who are zealous for good works.”

In other words, we are patiently waiting for Christ to come again, but we are not passively waiting. As His followers, we are living righteously and with self-discipline and for His glory. We are to be careful students of prophecy, but this doesn’t mean we are to stand around as star
gazers. We study what Jesus said about the future so that we can live with faithful obedience in the present.

Over the next several weeks, I want us to study the sections known as the Olivet Discourse, in particular Mark’s account. Within these verses we will find several things that Jesus said we can anticipate, things that lie just ahead over the horizon.

- Deception from false saviors
- Division among the nations
- Disaster in various places
- Difficulty for God’s people
- Deliverance at the return of Jesus
- Diligence until that day comes

Ray Stedman - “As we read this astonishing prophecy of Jesus, we will discover that the future He predicts is nothing more or less than the unfolding of events from trends that are already at work in human society. The future has already begun…As we study the Olivet prophecy, we will not only have a deeper understanding of the future, we will have a more complete understanding of the events taking place around us in our own day.”

I want us to begin by looking at the first four verses of the chapter, which helps establish context for what Jesus goes on to teach. Three things will emerge from the text—the misguided interests of the disciples, shocking information from Jesus, and prophetic intrigue over the future.

1. Misguided INTERESTS of the disciples

“And as He came out of the temple, one of His disciples said to Him, Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!”

Beginning in verse 1, we are given the context for the section. Jesus and His disciples had been in the temple complex, and as they exited, a conversation was had. As the small group crossed the Kidron Valley and ascended the Mount of Olives that overlooked the city of Jerusalem, Peter and James and John and Andrew ask Him about the coming destruction and
what they could anticipate before Christ’s triumphant arrival to His rightful throne. It is here that
I want us to pick up in verses 1-4.

Verse 1 begins, “And as He came out of the temple…” In the final week of His ministry, Jesus
came to Jerusalem. He had spent all day on Wednesday of the week of Passover teaching in
the temple complex. This was His last day of public ministry, which He brings to an end as He
leaves the temple with His disciples.

Matthew’s account records this more forcefully:

Matthew 24:1 - “Jesus left the temple.”

He had left their house to them desolate because of their rejection.

Mark records the interests of the disciples that were bound up in the temple and all of its
elaborate buildings. The temple was the focal point of Jewish life. They regarded the temple
with awe as the very dwelling place of God among His chosen people. The disciples were
impressed with the temple complex, and history tells us it was quite a sight to behold.

Background of the temple mount

The temple mount is the most disputed over piece of real estate in the whole world. If you have
ever been there or have seen pictures of it, you will see that it is not a very large piece of
ground, compromised of a little more than 30 acres. Yet it was on this piece of ground that
Abraham offered Isaac up as a sacrifice, but was stopped and given a ram instead. Abraham
named the spot ‘Jehovah Jireh’ which means the Lord Provides. It was a foreshadowing of
Christ and His sacrifice.

Later in Israel’s history, King David acquired the piece of property from a man named Arunah
and desired to build a permanent temple for the Lord there. Though David desired to do so, he
was not allowed to, and his son Solomon built the temple there instead years later.

Buildings on the temple mount

There have been two temples throughout Jewish history—the first one that was built by
Solomon, and the second one that was built by Zerubbel after the return of the exiles, which
was later refurbished and completely renovated by Herod the Great. The entire temple mount
had been enlarged by Herod’s engineers, by means of large retaining walls and vaulted
chambers on the south side and southeast corner. This meant that the large courtyard area atop the temple mount was basically doubled. The complex that Herod built was spectacular, to say the least. At the time of Jesus’ ministry, the temple was one of the most impressive structures in the world. It was made of massive blocks of limestone that had been perfectly quarried to interlock with one another.

The temple building was also made of gleaming white marble, and the whole eastern wall of the main structure was plated with gold that reflected the morning sun, which made it dazzle in the sunlight so that it was visible for miles.

**Battle for the temple mount**

There is currently a battle that is ongoing over who has the right to the property. Currently, the temple mount is controlled by Muslim clerics. Since 705 A.D., the Al-Aqsa mosque, known as the Dome of the Rock, has occupied the temple mount. You will frequently hear of violence occurring near the sight as Muslims and orthodox Jews clash over what Palestinians claim is Israeli encroachment on the holy sight. Control over the temple mount will be a major player in the last days.

As they leave the complex, the disciples marvel at the buildings and all of its wonderful decorum. But Jesus wasn’t impressed. While they were interested in buildings, the focus of Jesus was on other things.

**2. Shocking INFORMATION from Jesus**

“And Jesus said to him, Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.”

These words don’t carry as much weight for us as they did for the disciples who were no doubt dumbfounded at such a shocking statement. Rather than militantly establishing His rule and taking over in Jerusalem, Jesus says that the temple will be destroyed and not one stone will be left on top of another.

In 70 AD, Jesus’ words were literally fulfilled when the tenth Roman legion under the command of Titus destroyed the city of Jerusalem and brought the temple to the ground. A Jewish historian of that time named Josephus recorded the details of the account, which was one of the most violent events in world history.
When the Romans made their march against Jerusalem, the city was divided against three factions of Jews who fought against each other so bitterly that they were completely unaware of the approaching Roman army until it was too late. Once Titus and his tenth legion arrived, he set the city under siege which soon led to a severe famine. The bodies of those who died were stacked up like pallets in the streets. Once the city was breached, the Roman forces made their way to the temple and stacked up wooden scaffolding against its limestone walls which were then set on fire. The heat was so intense that the stones disintegrated, and the stones that were left were pried apart by the soldiers.

Literally, not one stone was left upon another. The temple itself was completely destroyed, though a portion of a wall around the temple area was left partially intact. This lone portion, called the Western Wall or the Wailing Wall, stands in Jerusalem to this day.

Ray Stedman - *“This prophecy, so remarkably and exactly fulfilled and confirmed by secular history, is convincing proof that God will fulfill every other part of His plan for the outline of history.”*

Jesus prophetically foretold of a coming storm that lies just ahead.

Erwin Lutzer, in his book “Where Do We Go From Here,” mentions five troubling trends in our society that we as a church must be prepared to address.

- Economic Decline

Our current financial situation in America is dire, to say the least. Our national debt stands at some $16 trillion, which we are increasing to the tune of $3 billion per day.

- Moral Decline

The president and other leaders of our nation would not have pledged their support for same-sex marriage if they did not believe that in recent years there has been a massive shift in morality in our culture.

School children are being indoctrinated in the acceptance of the normalcy of homosexuality. A third grade teacher in one of our neighboring counties here in NC ignited a firestorm of controversy when he read the book “King & King” to his students. The book is about two
princes who fall in love and marry. The issue went all the way to the Orange County school board, which upheld the use of the book in the school system.

Faith-based adoption agencies have already had to close because they were being forced to adopt children to same-sex couples, even though it was in violation of their religious convictions.

It is estimated that 60% of all pornography falls into the hands of children.

• Educational Breakdown

Our public schools have, for the most part, become government schools; often they are places of indoctrination for the nation’s degrading values—homosexuality, promiscuity, and atheistic evolution.

• Prejudicial Legal Rulings

Judicial rulings have frequently become more arbitrary and prejudicial, often violating respect for religious freedom. Today, the first amendment is turned on its head and the establishment clause is interpreted to mean that every expression of Christianity in the so-called public square violates the constitution.

• Growth of Islam

Biblical Christianity is in decline in the West, and Islam is growing.

Consider the state of faith in our nation. Pew research came out with a report a couple of months ago that said the fastest growing religious category in America is the “nones.” Basically, the trends show that we are becoming increasingly more secular and material as a society.

The “nones,” a category that includes people who self-identify as atheists or agnostics, as well as those who say their religion is nothing in particular, now make up 23% of all U.S. adults, up from 16% in 2007. The survey estimates the total number of what might be thought of as “nonreligious” Americans at 36.1 million in 2014.

The question of why the “nones” are growing less religious does not have a simple answer, but generational replacement appears to be playing a role. Religiously unaffiliated Americans are younger, on average, than the general public, and those who have entered adulthood in the last seven years are even less religious than the “nones” overall.
Fully seven in ten of these youngest Millennials (born between 1990 and 1996) with no religious affiliation say religion is not important in their lives. That's a shocking 70% of the youngest adult generation.

Consider what is eventually lost with a generation of people who deny the existence of God:

- biblical ethics and morality
- basis for moral law
- devaluation of human life

Is it any wonder that Jesus said His coming would be like a thief in the night? Billions of people will not even be looking for Him.

These words from Jesus in this chapter ought to shock us out of our complacency as disciples. We have been sheltered as a society for most of our lives, but the protective bubble that we have grown accustomed to is about to burst.

Do you hear it? I hear it in the headlines and see being played out in our culture. It’s the sound of somebody trying to strike a match, which once is lit, will ignite our world in flames.

Nothing short of a revival will save us as a nation of people.

3. Prophetic INTRIGUE over the future

“And as He sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked Him privately, Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?”

The disciples were troubled and confused and could not understand Jesus’ words concerning the temple. Astonished and intrigued, they ask Him a couple of questions:

- Tell us when this will happen?
- Tell us what to be looking for?

The disciples were looking for a political revolution. They were looking for Jesus to usher in His kingdom with power and great glory. Even though He had told them that He must die and be
raised to life again, they had no concept of His death, of the 20-plus centuries of church history, and of His second coming.

They couldn't picture the church age in their minds, for it was something that the prophets were silent about. They did not envision Jesus ascending to heaven where He has been now for some 2,000 years. What they had in mind when they asked Him about His coming was that point in time in which He would be crowned King and would usher in His Messianic reign. They wanted to know when this would be and what they were to look for.

Acts 1:6 - “So when they had come together, they asked Him, Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”

Their messianic expectations of a political ruler was still at the forefront of their thinking. Surely, now was the time that Jesus was going to overthrow Rome and establish His government of peace and perfect righteousness. Listen to what Jesus goes on to say:

Acts 1:7-8 - “He said to them, It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by His own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

In other words, Jesus tells His disciples that they have work to do. Instead of speculation things beyond their understanding, they have some work to do. The same truth applies to us. This last year sure has had its share of astonishing headlines. From last January until now, the world has witnessed major events.

• “The terrifying rise of ISIS: Map that shows how terror group’s tentacles now reach from Algeria to Afghanistan” (February, Daily Mail)

• “More than 1,800 dead as magnitude 7.8 quake rocks Nepal” (April, USA Today)

• “China, U.S. head toward face-off in South China Sea” (May, USA Today)

• “U.S.-China War ‘inevitable’ unless Washington drops demands over South China Sea” (May, The Telegraph)

• “Nine dead in shooting at black church in Charleston, SC” (June, USA Today)
• “U.S. Supreme Court rules states must allow same-sex marriage” (June, CNN)

• “Ten killed in shooting at Oregon community college” (USA Today)

• “Shocking images of drowned Syrian boy show tragic plight of refugees” (The Guardian)

• “International ground war needed in Syria to solve refugee crisis” (September, U.S. News & World Report)

• “Nato-Russia tensions rise after Turkey downs jet” (NY Times)

• “Paris attacks kill more than 100, police say” (NY Times)

The headlines scream of war, terrorism, political and economic upheaval, disaster, and moral collapse. In many ways, we are just like the disciples, asking the same question, “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of Your coming?” Jesus’ answer to us is the same answer He gave to His followers centuries ago—we are to be confident in Him. The gospel of Christ’s death for sinners, His glorious resurrection, and His second coming is good news that must be proclaimed.

Three points of application:

1—God doesn’t operate on our schedule—we operate on His!

2—What Jesus says will happen—will happen!

3—Believers are not to be passive while we wait—we are to be active!

  • Worship Passionately until Jesus comes again.
  
  • Witness Consistently until Jesus comes again.
  
  • Work Diligently until Jesus comes again.
  
  • Wait Patiently until Jesus comes again.

We may not know WHAT lies just ahead over the horizon, but we know WHO is in charge. Do you know Jesus Christ in a personal way? He died for us, and the future is secure for those are saved by grace through faith in Him.