

INTRODUCTION

Predicting the weather is tough sometimes. A group of Sioux Native Americans living in South Dakota asked their tribal chief if it was going to be a cold winter. He said, "I'll get back to you." Then he used his cell phone and called the National Weather Service, and they said they were pretty sure it would be a cold winter. The chief went back to his tribe and said, "It's going to be a cold winter, start gathering firewood." The members of his tribe asked him again, so he called the Weather Service again and got the same answer. The Chief went back and said, "Keep gathering firewood for a cold winter." After a few weeks, a member of the tribe asked him again if it was going to be a cold winter. So for the third time he called the National Weather Service. This time the meteorologists said, "Chief, we are now certain that this is going to be one of the coldest winters on record." The chief said, "What makes you say that?" The meteorologist said, "The members of the Sioux tribe are gathering firewood like crazy!"

Even with all the sophisticated computer models meteorologists have, they still miss a forecast sometimes. And the more extended the forecast, the greater the chance of an error.

Over the next three weeks we're going to share a mini-series entitled "Jesus' Extended Forecast." But Jesus wasn't making a weather forecast; He makes an amazing forecast about the future. And it is an extended forecast because some of His predictions in Mark 13 still have not yet taken place. And, unlike some weathermen, you can be certain His forecast is accurate.

We are still studying the events in the life of Jesus in the week that lead to the cross. A few days before the crucifixion, Jesus revealed details about the future.

Mark 13:1-13. As Jesus was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!" "Do you see all these great buildings?" replied Jesus. "Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down." As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John and Andrew asked him privately, "Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?"

Jesus said to them: "Watch out that no one deceives you. Many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and will deceive many. When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains."

"You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them. And the gospel must first be preached to all nations. Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit. "Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. Everyone will hate you because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved."

This is called the Olivet discourse, because Jesus is seated on the Mount of Olives with His disciples looking across at the beautiful Jewish Temple. Mark 13 is a parallel passage with Matthew 24 and Luke 21. During WEBS (Wednesday Evening Bible Study) we have been studying Matthew 24 and Luke 21. During WEBS we get to dig a lot deeper, so if the study of prophecy interests you, you might want to join us right here on Wednesday evenings from 6:00-6:30 p.m.

The most important event in the future is the return of Jesus Christ. In Mark 13 Jesus gives details of His return, but in the first part of the chapter He predicts three things that will happen before He returns.

I. JESUS PREDICTED THAT THE TEMPLE WOULD BE DESTROYED

Jesus said, "Not one stone here will be left upon another; everyone will be thrown down." The disciples commented to Jesus about the beauty and size of the Temple. Indeed it was a magnificent building. This was the second Temple, and Herod the Great had spent forty years and billions of dollars to upgrade and expand the Temple. The Jewish historian Josephus, who saw it with his own eyes many times, left us this description of it: "Now the outward face of the temple was covered all over with plates of gold of great weight, and, at the first rising of the sun, reflected back a very fiery splendor, and made those who forced themselves to look upon it to turn their eyes away, just as they would have done at the sun's own rays. But this temple appeared to strangers, when they were coming to it at a distance, like a mountain covered with snow; for as to those parts of it that were not gilt, they were exceeding white. On its top it had spikes with sharp points, to prevent any pollution of it by birds sitting upon it. Of its stones, some of them were forty-five cubits (68 feet) in length, five (8 feet) in height, and six (9 feet) in breadth." (Flavius Josephus, *The Jewish Wars*, Book V, Chapter 5)

As beautiful as the Temple was, Jesus knew the time was coming when it would be destroyed and not one stone would be left upon another. This was an audacious claim. The Temple was the main symbol of the Jewish nation. It was God's dwelling, so they believed it was as indestructible as God Himself.

It would be as audacious as me going to Washington D. C. and declaring that the U.S. Capitol Building would be destroyed. Maybe that's not a strong enough analogy. It would be like me going to Arlington and saying the Dallas Cowboys stadium would be destroyed!

A few days earlier Jesus made the same prediction when He entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. He stopped on the Mount of Olives and wept over Jerusalem. He also revealed why and how the city and Temple would be destroyed.

"As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, 'If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you.'" (Luke 19:41-44)

The reason the temple was going to be destroyed was because God had visited Jerusalem in the person of Jesus Christ and they refused to see Him as God. They were guilty of spiritual blindness. They didn't recognize Jesus came to bring them peace. They thought peace was being delivered from the Roman occupation. Jesus brought a different kind of peace, an inner, lasting peace that passes all understanding.

There may be people listening to me today who are making the same mistake. You haven't recognized that Jesus is God and only He can give you the peace you've been searching for. I pray that God will open the eyes of your heart and you will see Jesus and receive His peace.

The prediction of Jesus came true forty years later exactly as He described it. In 70 A.D. the Roman General Titus surrounded Jerusalem and laid siege to the city. No food went in and any Jews trying to escape were killed or enslaved. After the long siege, the Roman army attacked and the Temple and the city were destroyed. The gold plates of the Temple buildings had melted down between the stones, so the Roman soldiers took long iron bars to pry the stones apart to loot the melted gold. Herod's Temple was destroyed on the 9th Day of the Jewish month Av. 600 years earlier, Solomon's Temple had been destroyed by the Babylonians on the exact same day, the 9th of Av. To this day, Tisha Ba Av (which means 9th of Av) is considered the most tragic day in Jewish history and each year it is commemorated with a 25 hour fast.

I'm taking another group to Israel in a couple of weeks and we'll pray at the Western Wall. I've often had travelers look at the massive stones still remaining in the walls around the Temple Mount, and they ask, "I thought Jesus said all the stones would be dismantled." That's always a good question. And it has a simple answer. Look again at Mark 13:2. Jesus was referring to the stones in the Temple buildings, not the stones in the walls. There was no gold to be found inside the walls, so they were left standing.

This prophecy was fulfilled exactly as Jesus predicted. History confirms this extended forecast was 100% accurate.

II. JESUS PREDICTED THE RISE OF DISTURBING TRENDS

The disciples asked for a sign when some of these end-time things would happen. Jesus said, "These are the beginning of birth pains. You must be on your guard." Of course nobody except the Father knows exactly when these future events will occur, and anytime you read about someone setting a date, you immediately know they are a false prophet. Instead Jesus said we could look for certain trends to be happening. These are like birth pains for an expectant mother. When a mother-to-be is pregnant, they usually have a due date, but that's just an estimate. I read in a parenting magazine that only 5% of babies are born on their due date. But God has wisely designed the birth process that a woman starts having contractions a few hours before the baby arrives. The contractions serve as an early warning system, "this baby is coming so make your plans accordingly." That's the analogy Jesus used about certain disturbing trends. They serve as an early warning system for His return. He mentions three.

A. Spiritual confusion

Jesus said there would be many people showing up claiming they are the Messiah or that they have the ultimate spiritual truth. Hundreds of individuals have claimed to be the Messiah, including David Koresh of the Branch Davidians in 1993.

One reason there is so much confusion is there are so many different religions. There are 270 different major religions, and *thousands* of smaller, religious cults and groups. Here's one example of a cult. L. Ron Hubbard was a science fiction writer in the early 1950s. He wrote, "Writing for a penny a word is ridiculous. If a man really wants to make a million dollars, the best way would be to start his own religion." And so he started The Church of Scientology. So what do Tom Cruise and John Travolta believe? A human being is actually an eternal alien being called a thetan trapped on Planet Earth and forced to wear a meat suit. I'm not making this up. Before R. Ron Hubbard escaped from his meat suit in 1986 it was estimated that the Church of Scientology was making a profit of \$500 million annually.

There is more spiritual confusion out there than ever before.

B. Military conflicts

Jesus said there would be wars and rumors of wars. Of the 6,000 years of recording human history it is estimated that there have been only about 200 years without some major military conflict. Sometimes a rumor of a war can be scary. I grew up in South Alabama, during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Our town was well within the range of the Soviet Missiles in Cuba. In school, we practiced the duck and cover drill by sheltering under our desks. My dad even built and stocked a bomb shelter in the crawl space under our house. Those were scary times.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the Utopian movement was gaining momentum. It was a time of great inventions and promise. The telephone, airplane, and automobile had been invented. Some people were saying social evolution had ushered in a time of world peace. But then WWI broke out; it was to be the War to End all wars, but sadly it wasn't. Jesus predicted it would be this way.

C. Natural calamities

Jesus mentioned that earthquakes would be felt in various places. There have always been earthquakes, but we really only started measuring them and recording them since around the year 1900. Want to guess how many earthquakes occur each year? And we'll eliminate the very minor tremors of less than 2 on the Richter scale. The answer is 130,000. Of those 13,000 are strong enough to be felt, and about 1,300 are strong enough to cause some damage and possibly death.

I'm certainly not an alarmist, but the frequency of earthquakes is increasing. Take our neighboring state of Oklahoma, as an example. They went from 36 earthquakes in 2012, to 109 in 2013, to 585 in 2014, to 680 in 2015. Of course many people believe it is due to fracking, but that's still that's a whole lot of shakin' going on! But it's not just in Oklahoma; earthquakes are increasing around the world. But remember these are just trends Jesus mentioned.

III. JESUS PREDICTED PERSECUTION AGAINST HIS FOLLOWERS

He said, "Everyone will hate you because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved." There have been three main waves of Christian persecution. The first wave began not long after Jesus ascended into heaven. Thousands of the early believers were tortured and executed for their faith. This period of persecution lasted for almost 300 years until Emperor Constantine legalized Christianity. The next wave of persecution began in the 16th century as part of the reaction against the Protestant reformation. Thousands of Christians were killed because they forsook the official teachings of the Catholic Church. The third wave of Christian persecution is happening now. Over the past 100 years, more Christians have been killed for their faith than in any previous 100-year period. Most of this persecution is happening in Islamic Republics as thousands of Muslims convert to Christ. They are disowned and often killed because of their confession that Jesus is Lord. Christian persecution WILL happen, so what should be our reaction? Let me give you three challenges.

A. We can bear witness to Christ even when persecuted

Jesus said He would give us the words to say when we are arrested and put on trial. Many of these early Christians who were tortured to death died with such peace and contentment that the Roman soldiers executing them threw off their armor and professed faith in Jesus—and they were killed on the spot. When two Christians were killed, four stepped up to take their place. The church Father Tertullian wrote, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church."

You may not be facing death for your faith, but when you are criticized, or ostracized, or laughed at; don't react in anger or bitterness. Show them the love of Jesus.

B. We can carry the gospel to every people group on the planet

In Mark 13:10 Jesus said, "The gospel must FIRST be preached to all nations." The word "nations" doesn't mean countries with borders or governments. It's the word *ethnos*, which means ethnic or people groups. In Matthew 24 Jesus said that this gospel of the kingdom would be preached to all people groups and the end will come. There are over 10,000 different ethnolinguistic groups in the world. Most of them don't have a written language. But we have a missionary force of almost 100,000 missionaries working to record portions of the scripture in their unique heart language.

And even with the threat of persecution and arrest, we take the gospel into the dangerous areas of the world where missionaries are illegal. We do this because we believe God wants everyone to be saved. He wants everyone to have the chance to hear the good news that there is eternal life in Jesus Christ.

C. We can stand firm in the face of opposition

Jesus said, "The one who stands firm to the end will be saved." The end may not be the end of this age; it may refer to the end of your life. In a time when our culture is sinking in the shifting sands of popular opinion and morality by majority, God is looking for some people who will

STAND UP for what's right. Someone said that the person who will stand for nothing will fall for anything.

Martin Luther was a Catholic monk who started reading the Bible for himself. He wrote out 95 examples in which he thought the Catholic Church had committed heresy. He took a hammer and nailed that list to hang on the door at the church in Wittenberg. He was arrested and put on trial for heresy. He was later excommunicated. When given the chance to recant of his error he made a famous speech in which he said, "Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise."

Persecution is going to grow against believers in America. As we continue to preach the uncompromised truth that a fetus is a living person who deserves a chance to live, and that God's definition of marriage is one man and one woman, we will be criticized, castigated, and condemned. We will be pressured to change our position or lose business, or lose money, or lose our jobs. We need a generation of fearless Luthers to say, "Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise."

CONCLUSION

What is this world coming to? I don't know, but I know WHO is coming to this world. Jesus is going to return. All of history is moving toward this one event. I recall the first time Representative Louie Gohmert was showing me through the Library of Congress in Washington, I saw a plaque on the wall that grabbed my attention. It was a quotation from Alfred Lord Tennyson's poem in Memoriam. It says, "ONE GOD ONE LAW ONE ELEMENT AND ONE FAR OFF DIVINE EVENT TO WHICH THE WHOLE CREATION MOVES." Jesus Christ is going to return to planet earth and that is the main event to which all of creation is moving.

On one of our previous trips to the Philippines, we visited the Island of Leyte, which was hardest hit by Typhoon Yolanda. Our church paid to have several churches rebuilt and we restored all the buildings at Zion Bible College. When we first arrived we were taken to an important memorial for the Filipino people. It was a series of life-sized statues of American soldiers wading ashore. General Douglas MacArthur was in the lead. You might recall he was forced to leave the Philippines in the face of the Japanese advance. But he made a promise to the Filipino people. On March 21, 1942 he said, "I have come through and I will return." And two years later as the Japanese were being pushed out of the territory he walked ashore at Leyte Island and declared, "People of the Philippines. I have returned by the grace of God!"

MacArthur was a great man, but he was only a man. Yet he kept his promise to return. As Jesus was returning to heaven at His ascension He could have said the same thing, "I have come through, and I will return." He had come through all the Father had planned for Him. He had come through all the disgrace and hatred that people had thrown at Him, and yet He declared, "I will return!" And you and I can trust our lives and our futures to the man who made that promise. Jesus made an extended forecast about the future and you can be 100% certain that if He said it will happen, it will happen!

OUTLINE

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- B. Military conflicts
- C. Natural calamities

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- B. We can carry the gospel to every people group on the planet
- C. We can stand firm in the face of opposition

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



*David O. Dykes, Pastor
Green Acres Baptist Church
Tyler, Texas*