

W@W141

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Read Mark 12:18-23 *Then the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question. "Teacher," they said, "Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and have children for his brother. Now there were seven brothers. The first one married and died without leaving any children. The second one married the widow, but he also died, leaving no child. It was the same with the third. In fact, none of the seven left any children. Last of all, the woman died too. At the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?" (NIV)*

Very few people ask honest questions. The quest for learning with an open mind is rare. Like the questions by a cross examining barrister in court, which are designed to prove a point; so those with an axe to grind ask questions that will vindicate them and condemn their opponents. Until now, the religious Pharisees had been in the spotlight, but now Mark takes us behind the scenes of the Sadducee mind. They did not believe in a resurrection - the life you saw was the whole story: no afterlife for them.

So why did they ask a question about life beyond the grave? Had they heard that Jesus said he would rise again? Were they competing with their rivals, the Pharisees? They were trying to trap Jesus. But the question would inevitably rebound on them, because they had no understanding of heaven or hell. They could only assume that the life-to-come was the same as this life - one of human relationships with jealousies and rivalries. They had no other information other than to extrapolate the present into the future. Had they listened more carefully to Jesus, they would have asked a better question.

It is not a thirst for knowledge that brings us to God (*Paul describes such people as 'always learning but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth' 2 Tim 3:7*). Unless our starting point is informed by God's Word, there is little hope of arriving at His truth. And that was the point Jesus was going to make. It is the same with our friends: discussion about God can only reach the truth if it starts with His revelation. That is why it is important to tell out what God's Word says - they will never know otherwise! However many questions and comments may transit a coffee table, the truth will only emerge when we start with what God says! That is our daily challenge.

Prayer: *Dear Lord. I know that human discussion cannot arrive, unaided, at Divine truth. Help me to present what You have said, clearly and winsomely, so that my friends may be able to know the truth, and the truth will set them free. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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Read Mark 12:24-25 *Jesus replied, "Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God? When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. (NIV)*

The Sadducees had their own idea about how life should work - but without accepting God's view, they were bound to get it wrong. The problem of not starting with God, is that you cannot arrive with God. And there is certainly no way we can know about the after-life, if we ignore the Scriptures. When we reduce God to our earthly level, we automatically reject His power - as the primary factor in our origin, existence and destiny.

The Sadducees, who did not believe in an after-life or angels, got Jesus' rebuke. "You are in error", really means, "you are self deceived". They ignored God's Word and made up their own universe - they were fooling themselves (as does everybody who navigates without the Scriptural compass). Marriage, Jesus said, was for earth and not for heaven. We need marriage as a framework for sex and society - but the angels already live by a different social order. Our resurrection bodies will meet the needs of a Jesus focussed society, in which we are all children of one Father.

While God hates divorce, and Jesus spoke (far more clearly than our culture) about remarriage during the lifetime of the divorced spouse - widows and widowers are quite free to remarry. But the thrust of Jesus' comment was not so much to define marriage or heaven, as to alert them to the folly of self deception in this life - through a wilful disregard of God's Word. Our own society and government structures need this rebuke as much as we do; accompanied by the humility to change.

Prayer: *Dear Lord. Help me to restructure my thinking, speaking and actions by understanding and accepting Your Word - so that I will not deceive myself and live as though there is no judgment. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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Read Mark 12:26-27 *Now about the dead rising - have you not read in the book of Moses, in the account of the bush, how God said to him, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken!" (NIV)*

Worshipping God must be on His terms. Without revelation, nobody can understand God's character, or what pleases Him. The best they can do is to see the awesome creation and conclude the Creator will demand an account of our time spent here (cf [Romans 1:20](#)). Jesus wanted to discuss the resurrection: a tutorial for the disciples who would soon witness it; and a theology lecture to the Sadducees who thought it could not happen.

Because God is not confined by time, there is no past or future to Him - He sees both with equal immediacy, as if everything was happening now. The souls of the dead are also well known to Him, and He remains their God. The title which God uses for Himself, "I AM" (in [Exodus 3:14](#)), does not just mean that He is present in every age, but that every age is the present for Him. Not only is that true about the time span of human history, but also about the whole of eternity. That is why God is still the God of those who died in faith. So God's statement to Moses, about His continuing relationship with the patriarchs, was proof of the after-life.

Although heaven and hell are rarer topics for Gospel conversation these days, they are crucial to explain the eternal nature of God, and the consciousness of life for those who have died. As with any journey, our direction will determine our destiny: but the wise know that it is best for our destination to shape our direction. It is the greatest mistake to live with no thought of eternity; and a most selfish negligence, if Christians stay mute about eternity.

Prayer: *Dear Lord. Thank You for Your intimate knowledge of all people past, present and future. Help me to witness to what You have taught me about eternity, so that others may be warned and come to faith in Jesus. For His sake. Amen.*

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Read Mark 12:28 *One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" (NIV)*

There is an extraordinary drawing power in the words of wise people. Jesus greatly exceeded human wisdom, and became a magnet for those who hated Him; yet they could not get Him out of their minds. His stunning responses to trick questions evoked admiration. Although it is not clear whether this Rabbi was genuine or cynical, he came with an assumption: that some commandments were more important than others. The assumption was, of course, wrong.

Every religious philosophy, outside of Christ, works on the basis that you can get better - if only you have enough information and moral muscle. In order for this delusion to be credible, there has to be a hierarchy of commandments - weighted towards the ones that are easier to keep. The concept that any broken commandment (however apparently insignificant) is an absolute barrier preventing any fellowship with a holy God, would make every religious system impossible. But it is the truth. That is why we need Jesus as our sin-substitute. Only in Christ is every commandment as important as the others, and every sin equally offensive to God ... but then, only in Christ is there a wonderfully effective remedy for such sin!

Our relativistic world likes to demonise the rarest antisocial behaviour and smilingly ignore common sins. The commanding voice of God, through the Scripture, seems stunningly silent as the church ignores its obligation to proclaim the truth. This is not just important for the personal salvation of our friends, but also to bring communities back to the covenant of God's grace. People who do that are called prophets: many of them, like John the Baptist, were silenced ... but that just proves that their message was doing its job. Isn't it about time that we spoke up for the truth?

Prayer: *Father God. Help me to understand that there is no such idea as 'big and little sins'. Help me to re-examine my life and the way I talk about Your commandments, so that I will please You and that others may be released from their delusions about morality. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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Read Mark 12:29-31 *"The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these." (NIV)*

In response to the question, "Which is the most important commandment?", Jesus appears to give two answers. In fact, He only gives one. By using the singular, 'commandment', with the plural, 'these', He makes clear that the two commandments are one. And more than that, these two summarise all of the Old Testament laws.

God has not invented a hierarchy of laws. In His perfect world, everybody is to consider Him as always supreme and right and true, and to regard others as no less than ourselves. It is a world in which God is the centre (and not us), and in which others are never beneath us (indeed we are to serve each other). It is a world in which there is no place for self serving, demanding egos - a place where the Lord is adored for who He is and those who adore Him, give Him their all! Such a world would be heaven ... and it is!

Our preparation for eternity with God, is learned by taking our focus off ourselves and putting it, fully and gladly, onto the Lord. The way we live now, marks how much we long for His presence. We do not estimate this by some mystical feeling, but by our devotion to our Saviour and our willingness to serve others for His sake. The workplace is a good environment to practice!

Prayer: *Dear Lord. Thank You for making my obligation to You so straightforward - to love You and to serve others. Help me to do both, today and all this week. For Jesus' sake. Amen.*

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Read Mark 12:32-34 *"Well said, teacher," the man replied. "You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbour as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices." When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And from then on no-one dared ask him any more questions. (NIV)*

The rightness of God is obvious, but only to those who desire to be right with God. After Mark has recorded a battery of questions from the cynically rebellious hearts of the religious leaders, this man was willing to listen to Jesus' answer. More than that - he could see that what Jesus said made sense ... not just to his own reason, but according to the Scriptures. The Jewish creed, ([Numbers 15:37-41](#); [Deuteronomy 6:4-9](#), [11:13-21](#)) that he had learnt as a child, and still repeated every day, validated what Jesus said about the need to love God wholeheartedly. Samuel's rebuke to Saul in [1 Samuel 15:22](#), shaped his response to the second part of Jesus' answer.

He knew that Jesus was right, because what He said agreed with the Scriptures. And that is still the only way to be sure of what is true. The scribe neither manipulated Jesus nor the Scriptures - he took them as having equal authority - which indeed was true.

Alas today's religious philosophers make themselves wiser than both. To defy the Scripture is to defy Jesus - and He is the Judge! To agree with Scripture, is to agree with Jesus - who is the Word of God. It is hardly surprising that the only objective reference point we have about the mind of Jesus, the Bible, is under attack. But when we love the Word of God and conform our lives to it; how well our minds are settled and what spiritual productivity results!

Prayer: *Father God. Thank you that Your Word is the voice of Jesus to us. Help me to honour Your Word in my heart and practice it in my life so that the nature of Jesus may be evident to my friends and colleagues. For Christ's sake, Amen.*

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Read Mark 12:35-37 *While Jesus was teaching in the temple courts, he asked, "How is it that the teachers of the law say that the Christ is the son of David? David himself, speaking by the Holy Spirit, declared:*

"The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet." ' David himself calls him 'Lord'. How then can he be his son?"
The large crowd listened to him with delight. (NIV)

It's quite striking how Jesus goes on teaching, right up to the moment of His arrest and trial. This was crucial teaching for the disciples - 'last words' always embed themselves in the memory. Having faced questioning from His accusers, Jesus now puts them on the spot. He is forcing them to rethink their doctrine of who the Messiah (the Christ) would be (but knowing that the disciples would use the teaching much better). They thought that the Messiah would be their victorious leader but also a son of David (and therefore one who would be their son to serve them). This view was not wrong (cf [Is. 9:6](#)), but it was incomplete.

So Jesus crystallised the question.: if [Ps 110:1](#) called the Christ David's Lord - how can He be David's son? We have the benefit of knowing that Jesus was the son of David by His human genealogy, but also the Lord of all - by appointment. It was important that the disciples understood this before the darkness of Calvary. We know that they did get the message because Peter's Pentecost message included these words *"Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."* ([Acts 2:36](#)). Without Jesus being Lord, there is no Master over death or Saviour for eternal life.

This is the central theme of Mark's Gospel; and it remains the crucial question for today: "Who is Jesus?". If He is not Lord by God's appointment, it would be blasphemous idolatry for us to make Him Lord. But if He is, then He has the right to our obedience and worship! Much Christian 'soft-talk' misses the central point. Conversations about religion, church, priesthood or the perversities that sell newspapers - all that is often wasted time. Ask the key question, "What do you think of Jesus, who is He?" That will lead the conversation to the heart of the gospel - and to salvation for those who will hear!

Prayer: *Father God. Thank You that You have appointed Jesus to be Lord of all. Help me not to be ashamed to say that he is my Lord - and help me to have Jesus-centred conversations with those who are yet to believe in Him. For His Name's sake. Amen.*

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Read Mark 12:38-4 *As he taught, Jesus said, "Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted in the market-places, and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honour at banquets. They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. Such men will be punished most severely." (NIV)*

The crowds had been listening with delight, as Jesus cut through the pomposity and cynical arrogance of the religious leaders. Now Jesus rebuked these men publicly! Warning the crowds against the self-righteous and self-seeking clerics, Jesus was advising the ordinary people not to get caught up in the religious hatred that would finally call for His death. In exposing these men for what they were, Jesus was also sealing His own death warrant.

The power of pride is immense. The rabbis were supposed to teach God's truth but instead, they used their supposed holiness for personal popular applause. And they extracted money from vulnerable people, to line their own pockets. Prayer was no longer in relationship with God but a showpiece of oratory - just acting up to the crowd. So, Jesus said that severe punishment awaited them.

James, the brother of the Lord Jesus realised that His comments were not just for Pharisees, but for Christians as well. He wrote, *"Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly."* ([James 3:1](#)). So we need to examine ourselves and root out any self-stained motive that would like to use fellowship or ministry for personal advantage. Paul repeats the instruction in [1 Cor. 11:27-31](#) (click the link!). So, perhaps it is high time for a motive-audit ... before the inspection starts.

Prayer: *Father God. Please make me realise that my relationship with You - is not for a play-acting display towards others, but to serve You. Forgive me when I have used Christian fellowship or ministry to my own advantage; and help me to repent by renouncing any such evil way - so that You may be glorified. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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Read Mark 12:41-44 *Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny. Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything - all she had to live on." (NIV)*

This story follows on from Jesus' warning to the crowd against the hypocritical clerics: and it illustrates His earlier teaching on motives. Rich people can not only afford to give more but also (in this narrative) could not afford to pass up the chance for everybody to notice. This was supposed to be service to God. But it became a self-rewarding exercise of no spiritual value (cf [Matt.6:1-4](#)). It was not that the giving was wrong, but it lacked sincere motive. It was also only a tiny proportion of their assets - they could easily afford it to buy the acclaim of the crowd.

By contrast, the widow had very little, but because of her devotion she gave everything. It was that ultimate sacrificial gift that Jesus commended. It was also a little picture of His sacrifice later that week. The value to God was far higher than that of the rich man's cast-off cash. It was not what she gave that counted, but how much she did not hold back.

Prudence often dictates our financial giving, more than our devotion to Jesus Christ. That is not good. The Christian life is intended to be a life like Christ's, in which we are willing to give everything. Holding back what should have been devoted to God was the sin of Achan ([Josh. 7:1-26](#)), Saul ([1 Sam. 15:1-23](#)) and Ananias & Sapphira ([Acts 5:1-11](#)). Let's be determined not to follow their bad example!

Prayer: *Holy Father. I know that You look for a cheerful and willing giver. Help me to reconsider my tithes and offerings so that I will give what You deserve. For Christ's sake. Amen.*

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Read Mark 13:1-2 *As he 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." (NIV)*

With only days until Jesus' death, He now teaches about the future. The magnificent temple was still under construction (to be completed in AD 64). It was an architectural wonder, a matter of pride for all Jews. However it was also a political stunt by Herod the Great - to gain popularity, and to make a name for himself. At best, buildings for worship are the product of divine instruction and personal sacrifice; but at worst, they actually become the objects of worship wrapped in mixed motives and self-interest.

Jesus, who knew the future, said that all the revered buildings would be razed to the ground. And it was only 6 years after the scaffolding was taken down, when the future emperor Titus would level the Temple Mount and surrounding city. As predicted, not even one stone would be left in situ. Having rejected God's sacrificial Lamb, there was no longer any point in offering sacrifices. Christless religion, in a temple that was intended to point towards Him, was futile.

However splendid the architecture, if a building **for** worship merely becomes the object **of** worship, God's intention is frustrated, and the building is redundant to His purposes. Like any landlord of redundant property, He is entitled to dispose of it as He wishes! Today, beautiful buildings are not wrong; but if their glory replaces Christ-centred worship - they are worthy of a dreadful end. That thought should help us to find a perspective between ministry tools (such as buildings) and ministry itself.

Prayer: *Father God. Thank You for all that You provide to help me to worship and serve You in the local church and at work. Help me to see Your gifts for what they are, but never to worship them; and to give You all the glory. For Jesus' sake. Amen.*

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Read Mark 13:3-4 *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?" (NIV)*

What a place for a tutorial! The Mount of Olives (the place of His later ascension of [Acts 1:12](#), and future return of [Zech 14:4](#)) had a great view of the temple, which Jesus had just predicted would be destroyed ([Mark 13:1-2](#)). The disciples believed what He had said about its destruction - but wanted to know "when?"

In Biblical prophecy, there is never enough information for us to outwit God's plan; but always enough clues, so that those who are looking can know that its fulfilment is a deliberate act of God. That is why we are challenged to look with longing for the return of Jesus ([2 Tim 4:8](#)). However, the interval between the end of Jesus' earthly ministry and His return is a very significant period - we are in it right now! And so, Jesus was about to prepare them (and us).

"What is going to happen?", is a natural human concern. If we know what will happen and when; we can plan, prepare, and generally be in control of our lives. And there is much to be said for using time wisely: good diary management will certainly enable Christians to be more effective at work and in ministry. But some things are not given for us to control - God reserves the right to keep them as His secrets (cf [Deut. 29:29](#))! We cannot plan or manage them - we simply have to trust Him.

Prayer: *Father God. Thank you for all the things that you have given to me to manage: help me to be responsible to You for them. Thank You too that You have not entrusted me with other things; matters that are for You alone to direct, and for me to trust. Help me to keep trusting, because You always do what is right. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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Read Mark 13:5-8 *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 rumours 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. (NIV)*

Church history is littered with deceivers - people who claim what is not true, about themselves, others, the Bible or God. The greatest deceit is to pretend to be Jesus. That is straight out of a Satanic masterclass. Ever since the Garden of Eden, he has always liked pretending to be the authoritative mouthpiece of God. But the true voice of God is never in conflict with His written Word; and that is our constantly reliable reference point.

A 'fallen' world with its disordered geology will produce earthquakes. Disordered ecology will see famines; and disordered societies will be fighting (often these two are seen together). And when neither is happening, people fear that they might! None of this was God's design, it is the consequence of sin in the world. Yet natural superstition and distorted religion likes to attribute them to God: they suggest that these horrible events demand God's personal intervention. But to assume that any of these must herald the return of Christ is fanciful (and wrong) thinking - although extreme suffering should make believers long for eternity even more.

But a disrupted world with dislocated societies are a sign of the return of Jesus - or at least a sign that this world will never be heaven ... and that we should seek a Saviour who is to come. He will redress all wrongs and establish new heavens and a new earth which will be called 'a home of righteousness' ([2 Peter 3:13](#)). The unsatisfactory world with its frustrating and disappointing relationships should make us long for Jesus to come back and sort it all out! Until then, let not us (nor our friends) be fobbed off by any substitute saviour.

Prayer: *Almighty God. Thank you, that You do not let this world glow so bright, that we stop desiring the return of Jesus. But please keep us alert to reject the substitutes that Satan would like to charm us with, and to alert our friends too. For the sake of our only Saviour, Jesus. Amen.*

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Read Mark 13:9-11 *"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. (NIV)*

Persecution might make us run away, and/or make us cry out for the return of Christ. But, Jesus said, when others hate us because of Him, that is not the signal to retreat from the gospel, but to advance! So, Jesus' instruction: "be on your guard", was not advice about our personal protection. It echoes v.5, "Watch out that no-one deceives you". The disciples needed to be alert and prepared, so that they would respond well when the attacks came. Jesus knew all about the future opposition, in fact, He would use it - it was all part of the gospel strategy.

Through persecution, the believers would have to explain their beliefs to the highest religious and civil authorities. The 'Jesus phenomenon' was never designed to be a private and hidden piety - but to be broadcast. So, the disciples were not to hide their faith, not to resist arrest, and not to worry about how they would defend themselves. The Holy Spirit would be directing operations - so that through human hostility, the peace of God might be presented to kings and whole nations.

Nobody likes disapproval, antagonism or hatred. That is why we need to be on our guard (against ourselves!). Human reactions will urge us to hide, fight, worry and even lie about our confidence in Christ. But when we understand God's strategy, and are working with the Holy Spirit (instead of resisting His way); then we can be less precious about ourselves, and more confident that God knows what He is doing. The purpose is that we will speak about the grace of Jesus Christ - and others will be saved!

Prayer: *Precious Jesus, help me to be ready for the dark days which You will allow for me, so that I will work with You, by telling others why I love You. When my faith is ridiculed, may my reaction show my confidence in You as I speak up for You. For Your Name's sake. Amen.*

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W@W154

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Read Mark 13:12-13 *"Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. (NIV)*

Families are special! They should provide a secure place where we are loved, and we can love others freely, without fear. When people believe in the saving grace of Christ, they are adopted into God's family, and He calls them 'His children'. So every believer has two families - a natural one and a spiritual one. In God's creation design, there should be no conflict between the two - but when sin entered the world, we also saw the first murder - brother on brother ([Genesis 4:1-12](#)).

Because human nature is at war with God, joining the family of God may not be well received by others in our human family. Jesus often upsets the way a family sees authority, and introduces a disturbing new dynamic. As He is Lord, those who submit to Him become targets for those who refuse to obey Him. Jesus did not minimise the pain of this situation, or suggest ways of minimising the Christian's discomfort: His command was simple, "stand firm!"

When people hate you, sideline you or become rebels; all because you serve Jesus ... what should you do? However hard it is, your first loyalty is to your Heavenly Father. Jesus' instruction to, "stand firm" is for us too. If necessary, we must just keep trusting and not to be dissuaded, even by family. Such gentle courage in the face of derision (or even being put out of the family) is a mark that Jesus, and not the family, has the right to own you. What He allows must be all right, and we can be confident that His salvation is certain in the end.

Prayer: *Father God. Thank you for making me a part of Your family, as I trust in the grace of Christ. Help me to keep on loving my family: but if they don't love me, or their hatred boils over against me, help me to keep on trusting in Jesus and His unique salvation. For Jesus' sake. Amen.*

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Read Mark 13:14-15 *"When you see 'the abomination that causes desolation' standing where it does not belong - let the reader understand - then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let no-one on the roof of his house go down or enter the house to take anything out. Let no-one in the field go back to get his cloak. (NIV)*

Prophecy in the Bible can be as puzzling as viewing distant mountain ranges - it is difficult to work out if the peaks are close together or far apart. Today's passage starts in Daniel ([Dan. 9:27](#); [11:31](#); [12:11](#)). The 'abomination' is a person who destroys the holy place. Its first fulfillment was in 167 BC when the Syrian ruler, Antiochus Epiphanes, offered pig sacrifices to the pagan god Zeus over the Temple altar. Jesus now used the same expression to point forward to AD67 when Jewish Zealots would profane the temple; and to AD70 when the temple would be razed to the ground by General Titus.

However, Jesus is also predicting the end of the Last Days when the Anti-Christ will come (also predicted in [Daniel 9:25-27](#) and reinforced by Paul in [2 Thess. 2:3-4](#)). So, readers in different times would need to interpret the signs in a contemporary way. The message remained the same - in contrast to the persecution that would herald gospel opportunity, it was a time to get out ... to evacuate without any delay. Such opposition has no appetite for listening to anything, especially the gospel.

It is so important to understand that God sees the entire future timetable, and will tell us how to respond. Between the 'stand firm' of v13 and the 'flee' of v14 is a big decision - what shall we do? But we are not left alone, to work it out for ourselves: the Holy Spirit, who caused the Bible to be written, will also show us how to apply it - so that we will understand God's will. Then we will be able to respond rightly to any persecution, up until the day that Jesus comes again.

Prayer: *Ever-wise God. Thank You that You know everything about the future, and that You have planned both the gospel strategy and security of Your people. Please give me daily wisdom to know how to apply Your Word in my circumstances - so that when the biggest tests come, I will be well tuned in understanding how to do Your Will. For Christ's sake. Amen.*

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Read Mark 13:17-20 *How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! Pray that this will not take place in winter, because those will be days of distress unequalled from the beginning, when God created the world, until now - and never to be equalled again. If the Lord had not cut short those days, no-one would survive. But for the sake of the elect, whom he has chosen, he has shortened them. (NIV)*

The atrocities that accompanied the temple desecrations of AD 67 and 70 were not worth staying around for! Nor will be the time of the Anti-Christ. But fleeing for your life is no fun either. As has so often happened in our generation, notably in Africa and the Balkans, what the selfish imperialist sees as being justified is simply sheer misery to many. Jesus does not minimise the future threat, but neither is He callous. He has great compassion on pregnant women and those with very young children, especially if it is cold or in the rainy season - Jesus has no pleasure in any suffering.

But, you may remember from yesterday, this passage is a kaleidoscope of prophecy which includes the very last days before Jesus comes again. The hostility towards God's people and the terror in the world will become so intense - yes, even more extreme than any mayhem so far in history. Indeed, if those days were not kept on a leash, there would be no survivors. Even in those darkest of days, the children of God may be confident that their Father is not only the sustainer, but also the referee who will blow the final whistle.

It would be nice if God only allowed nice things to happen to Christians. But that would not be the real world, which is corrupt at its core. One day, evil will be seen for what it truly is, with no flesh-comforting camouflage. There will be no doubt about the righteousness of Jesus in sorting it out. Then, every knee will have no choice but to bow to Him. However for those of us who love Him, who 'are waiting for His appearing', He will be kind to us ... as He is every day now.

Prayer: *Father God. It is difficult to imagine the worst of trials, but I thank You that I have Jesus and He has a special interest in my welfare and protection. For every mercy I have received, thank You. Help me to trust your loving kindness every day until Jesus comes again. In His Name. Amen.*

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Read Mark 13:21-23 *At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'Look, there he is!' do not believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and miracles to deceive the elect - if that were possible. So be on your guard; I have told you everything ahead of time. (NIV)*

It is in the nature of Satan to pursue his evil activities, right up until the day that Christ returns. Indeed [Revelation 12:12](#) says, "*Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short.*" (NIV)

Part of his terminal evil work is to invent substitute Christs. There will be no shortage of experts, purveying false spirituality, and they will try to invade and seduce the churches. Even some who would consider themselves Christians may be led astray. So we now come to the third '*be on your guard/watch*' (in v.23) of this chapter (cf [vv.5,9](#)). As before, it is not a personal security alert - like an air raid siren commanding us to take cover: it is the need to guard ourselves, lest our gullibility and sentimentality about religion leaves us open to believe what is false about God's Son.

A good start is important in every race, but a good finish is essential. Paul's question reinforces this in [Galatians 5:7](#) - "*You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth?*" (NIV). The Bible is our only objective reference point, and the church discards it at its peril - even eternal peril. Whatever the trendy theologians may say, stick to God's Word, and the Jesus who died for you will see you safely home.

Prayer: *Loving God. Thank You for warning me about the malicious attempts of Satan to drag me away from Your truth. Help me to be properly alert, and to check every 'spiritual' idea against Your written Word of truth - so that I will not be deceived. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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Read Mark 13:24-27 *"But in those days, following that distress, " 'the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.' "At that time men will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens. (NIV)*

It is a common mistake to think that everything will continue as it always has. Global warming is slightly shaking that assumption, but many think it will not really make much difference ... and so they continue as before. But God has the right to do whatever He chooses, and that will include the way the night sky will undergo sudden change, and the sun (on which we depend for so much) will be switched off. Everything we think of as the 'natural world' will not continue in autopilot indefinitely: When God intervenes, the change will be as radical as His creative masterstrokes in [Genesis Ch.1](#).

Not only will the visible creation undergo change, but God's invisible creation (the angels) will have a new task - to bring in the harvest of His own people. Both the living and the dead in Christ will be brought together to greet the Lord Jesus: as the the bridegroom finally comes for His bride (the church). Coming after such dreadful predictions about the future ([vv.11-23](#)), Jesus is explaining the 'hope' of the Christian - certain confidence that (despite whatever may happen) Jesus will come to claim His own ... and nothing will stop Him!

From the earliest days of the church, the Christian's 'hope' has been the essential ingredient to survive and thrive in hardship. Today, more Christians are suffering because of their faith than at any other time in history. But there will come a day when Jesus returns and every right-thinking believer longs for that day.

Prayer: *Father God. Thank you that there will be an end point to this corrupt world and that Jesus will return for all His people, including me! Help me to see how pathetic this world is compared to the splendour of meeting Jesus: may I eagerly long for that day. In the difficult times, help me to hold onto that 'hope' that You are coming for me. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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Read Mark 13:28-30 *"Now learn this lesson from the fig-tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door. I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. (NIV)*

We learn much by observation. The repeated cycles of seasons and crops teach us what to expect next in the garden or the fields. In the same way, Jesus said, when some of His predictions are seen - that is the time to expect His return.

In fact, throughout history, Christians have seen glimpses of such fulfilment and have wanted to prepare themselves for the coming of the King. And that is a very good thing. The 'hope' of the Christian is not so much anticipating the end of suffering, as welcoming the Lord of Glory. To prepare for such a climactic event should be second nature for us. Alas, the excitement of our personal lives, our business activities or the sheer enjoyment of what this world can offer - all that can distract us from the goal of our faith ... Christ Himself!

We should not need painful spurs to remind us that this world is not our home - but we do! As humans who adapt all too well to the world around us, like chameleons that merge into the background; we need every reminder that we are frail and weak, physically and spiritually. The evil that taints so many of our good intentions also blinds us to the reality that Christ is coming. Such blindness will leave us dangerously unprepared for life and eternity. So, perhaps it is high time for a personal spiritual stocktaking.

Prayer: *Dear Lord. I get so easily mesmerised by all that I have to do, that I forget the most important thing - to be ready for Your return; and the shutdown of all the things I consider so permanent. Help me to live wisely, discerning the times in which I live, so that I will be ready for You whenever you come or call me to Yourself. For Your Name's sake. Amen.*

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Read Mark 13:31 *Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. (NIV)*

When we realise that this geophysical world, (with its surrounding geophysical heavens) is a temporary construction, we may be shaken into wondering: what then is permanent? For the disciples, all this teaching so close to Jesus' death must have been overwhelming. But this chapter shows His reassurances were never far away. The answer to the question of permanence is simple; only the words of Jesus stand for ever!

This is an essential guarantee for our faith too. Without the Gospel narratives, and the Word of God in the Old Testament (validated by Jesus) and the instructions by the New Testament apostles (validated by Jesus), we could have no confidence with which to navigate through time to eternity. Jesus claims that His words are the eternal measure of truth, and the only objective reality. Such a statement casts Jesus in a unique position, infinitely above any religious wise man, prophet or pious philosopher.

In today's spiritual marketplace, where the sentimental, the supernatural and the surreal all compete for hearts and minds, Jesus alone is 'for ever' true. Even the politics of compromise and tolerance are no match for Him. It is not good enough to believe that something is true for you - if it is not true for everybody ... and for ever. In Jesus alone we have words that can never fail. And, He is the real person who will make sure that everything conflicting with His words is destroyed, and all that conforms will last for ever. Terrifying and comforting! It should be impossible to keep such news a secret!

Prayer: *Eternal God. Thank You that the words of Jesus are not only true for now, but for ever. Help me to let His words shape my life and my lips, because I know that they define my eternity ... and the future for all my family and friends. In His Name. Amen.*

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