

April 16/17, 2005

*The Good News About Jesus According to Mark*

## **Looking for God**

**Mark 13:1-37**

Pastor Andy MacFarlane

In March of 2000, the Denver *Rocky Mountain News* ran an article on the various web sites that claim to be able to transmit prayer requests to God. One such web site, [Newprayer.com](http://Newprayer.com) claimed to be able to transmit prayer requests to God's most likely location, a star cluster called M13. Crandall Stone, an engineer and free lance consultant, set up this site. He and his friends used the Big Bang theory of creation and the input of some NASA scientists to determine God's most likely location. Once they determined this, they chipped in about \$20,000 and set up a radio-wave transmitting site. According to the article, they were transmitting 50,000 prayer requests a week!

Friends, there are people out there who are desperate to know God. We might be surprised that 50,000 people would submit their requests to a web site, but that would raise the question: Where do we go to find God? As we look in Mark chapter 13 and work our way through all 37 verses, we will try to answer the question: Where do we find God?

Our passage opens with Jesus and His disciples leaving the temple. Verse 1 says this:

**As He was going out of the temple, one of His disciples said to Him, "Teacher, behold what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!"** (Mark 13:1, \*NASB)

One of the disciples simply stops to admire the beauty of the temple. There was good reason: the temple was one of the most impressive sights in the ancient world. It was considered an architectural wonder. But Jesus' response to the disciples is that they better enjoy it while they can, because it's not going to be around for long.

Verse 2:

**And Jesus said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left upon another which will not be torn down."**

Can you imagine the confusion, the shock, here? This impressive building that had been around for years and years and years—Jesus says, "It's going to be gone."

When I was in college my parents moved from Houston up to New Jersey. My dad took a job in New York City. So every Christmas break when I would go to visit, I would always take one day to go into the city with my dad. New York City is an amazing place, and I would just walk around looking at all the massive buildings. On one of those visits, if you had told me that the World Trade Center would be leveled, I would not have understood.

Well, the disciples are experiencing that same kind of confusion and lack of understanding here, so they ask for some clarification.

Verses 3 and 4:

**As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew were questioning Him privately, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are going to be fulfilled?"**

Jesus begins His explanation with a warning. And we're going to see a number of these as we go through the passage: "Be on your guard. Be diligent. Be vigilant."

Verse 5:

**And Jesus began to say to them, "See to it that no one misleads you. Many will come in My name, saying, 'I am He!' and will mislead many."**

Jesus warns against the ever present danger that God's people will be led away by false prophets and false messiahs who are particularly prone to show up in times of crisis. He continues in verses 7 and 8:

**"When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be frightened; those things must take place; but that is not yet the end. For nation will rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will also be famines. These things are merely the beginning of birth pangs."**

We always run the risk of misinterpreting contemporary events. And the disciples were no different. Assuming that Mark wrote about 65 A.D., at the time of Mark's Gospel the Roman Empire was passing through some hard times—some disturbances, some political uprisings. Jesus says, "Don't worry." But His words here are ominous because He said, "You don't need to worry about these wars and rumors of wars and these natural disasters, but there is something coming that ought to shake you to your core." He says, "These wars and rumors of wars—they are just birth pangs." Something far more intense is coming.

It is very important here to understand there was both an immediate fulfillment of Jesus' words and there is a greater fulfillment that is even now yet to come. In a sense the immediate fulfillment was a foreshadowing of a greater fulfillment yet to come in a time known as the Great Tribulation spoken of in Daniel and Revelation.

Verse 9:

**"But be on your guard [*here is another call to vigilance*] for they will deliver you to the courts, and you will be flogged in the synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them."**

The disciples and the followers of Jesus are going to be subject to rejection and abuse, and it's going to be so bad, in fact, in verse 12 we'll find out they will be turned over by family members and friends. Verse 10 gives us one of the main reasons for this rejection and abuse. It says:

**"The gospel must first be preached to all the nations."**

Jesus knows, as He looks ahead, the Jews are not going to like the idea of God's message going to the Gentile world. They will turn on the disciples, and they will turn hard on the disciples. But in the midst of all this, there is a word of comfort in verse 11. Jesus says:

**"When they arrest you and hand you over, do not worry beforehand about what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but it is the Holy Spirit [*I'll be with you; I'll give you the words in those moments*]."**

Verses 12 and 13:

**“Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and have them put to death. You will be hated by all because of My name, but the one who endures to the end, he will be saved.”**

I don't think this statement refers to our salvation. But I think Jesus is talking about rejection and abuse. He says the one who goes through to the end will be vindicated in God's court, even though he might be found guilty in human courts.

So to this point, Jesus says, “You don't need to worry about these wars and rumors of wars and these natural disasters. But there is something coming that ought to shake you to your core.” And we're going to find out about that in verses 14-23. Please take notice: The dominant command in verses 14-23 is “to flee”—to get out. We will unpack that as we go.

Verse 14:

**“But when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION standing where it should not be (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains.”**

This is a challenging passage to interpret. Here in verse 14 Jesus uses apocalyptic language from the Book of Daniel, so commentators think this refers to the end times judgment. But again, the dominant note is to flee. If it is the end times judgment, where do you go? I think Jesus is referring here to the destruction of the temple by the Romans in 70 A.D. And He uses apocalyptic language from the Book of Daniel to say, “This will be a very serious event.” History tells us that in the fall of 67 through the spring of 68 A.D., the Zealots sect among the Jewish religion took over the temple and committed a number of villainous acts in the temple, culminating with the clown Phanni taking on the role of the high priest. This is the Abomination of Desolation. He took on a role that was not his, and in so doing, totally defiled the temple.

So Jesus says, “When you see this stuff happening, get out! Go!” Look at verse 15:

**“The one who is on the housetop must not go down, or go in to get anything out of his house; and the one who is in the field must not turn back to get his coat [*when you see this stuff, just go!*]. But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! But pray that it may not happen in the winter.”**

(vs. 15-18)

History tells us that up until the spring of 68 A.D., it was relatively easy to get out of Jerusalem. But then with the Romans closing in, it became harder and harder to leave the city. So Jesus says to His followers, “When you see this stuff happening, get out!”

Well, how bad was this destruction of the temple? How bad would it get? Verse 19:

**“For those days will be a time of tribulation such as has not occurred since the beginning of the creation which God created until now, and never will.”**

Here's the idea. From the beginning of time, God's people have suffered affliction and persecution. But Jesus said, “From all the time up until 70 A.D. when the temple is destroyed, nothing will rival the affliction by the Romans in the destruction of the temple. Nothing beforehand will be that bad.” It is sobering to realize that as bad as 70 A.D. was the greater fulfillment of Jesus' words is yet to come.

But God is in control. Verse 20:

**“Unless the Lord had shortened those days, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect, whom He chose, He shortened the days.”**

Even though it's the world's most powerful army coming in to destroy Jerusalem and the temple, God still remains in control, and He says, “I shortened the time for the sake of My elect.” And He finishes this warning to flee with another call to be on your guard against false prophets and false teachers.

Verse 21:

**“And then if anyone says to you, ‘Behold, here is the Christ’; or, ‘Behold, He is there’; do not believe him; for false Christs and false prophets will arise, and will show signs and wonders, in order to lead astray, if possible, the elect. But take heed; behold, I have told you everything in advance.”** (vs. 21-23)

The destruction of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple will certainly be a time of crisis. And false prophets will be rising up to speak a “word” from God.

This has been a pretty discouraging passage so far, wouldn't you say? The temple is going to be destroyed—this magnificent building. But more than losing the building, in the thinking of many of God's people, they will lose access to God. You see, for hundreds of years God's people have gone into the temple and have gone through certain rituals to meet God. And if you were to ask them the question, “Where do we find God?” they would say, “We go to the temple.” No more, because the temple is not going to be there. Not only that, not only have they lost access to God, but they've got to deal with all these false prophets and false messiahs. Is there any encouragement? Is there any reason to hope from this passage?

Yes, there is—starting in verse 24:

**“But in those days, after that tribulation, THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL BE FALLING from heaven, and the powers that are in the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see THE SON OF MAN COMING IN CLOUDS with great power and glory. And then He will send forth the angels, and will gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest end of the earth to the farthest end of heaven.”**  
(vs. 24-27)

Friends, in the midst of the loss of this temple and seeming loss of access to God, there is good news: God is still available! He's still accessible—in a relationship with Jesus Christ. And here's the hope we have: One day He is going to come back. This is not metaphorical. This is not allegorical. It is a literal, physical return of Jesus Christ. That is why we sing, “From everlasting to everlasting, Immortal God” with enthusiasm. We don't know much about the future, but here's what we know: Our God is coming back one day. And when He comes, He is going to be gathering His people from the four winds, from the farthest points of the earth, to Himself.

We started this passage asking a question: Where do we find God? And Mark 13 is letting us know that God is no longer found in a building or going through some kind of ritual. The ministry of Jesus Christ means the temple is being done away with and God is now being found in a relationship. So we answer the question, “Where do we find God?” by saying, “Jesus Christ is the One through whom we find God.” *Jesus Christ is the One through whom we find God.*

Now, make no mistake in this passage: We are seeing the judgment of God. For hundreds of years His people have been living in rebellion to Him. And we saw one of the symptoms of that rebellion a few weeks ago. Bryan walked us through Jesus' cleaning out the temple. His people, because of their rebellion, had turned their sacred meeting place with God into a place of extortion. But I would suggest to you that even in the midst of the judgment of God we see the goodness of God, because He's putting away the inferior way of finding and meeting Him, and showing us a superior way—a relationship.

In fact, in a few weeks Bryan will walk us through Mark 15. At the time of Jesus' death the veil of the temple is torn in two—signifying the end of the barrier between God and man. Jesus' ministry signals the end of the temple as a way of finding God. No longer is our meeting God defined by being in a certain building or going through certain rituals, but rather in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

I have often found in life it is hard to get people to give up their tried and true ways to attempt a new and better way of doing something. While we were in Chile, we house sat for some missionaries who were on furlough. Part of the deal was we got their maid, Carmen, for a day and a half a week. (I realize I'm probably hurting the cause of all missionaries trying to raise support, because I don't get a maid here in the States...but it was just one of the things we got.) This lady became very, very dear and special to us. While we lived in that house, Hope was going through a very demanding pregnancy, and this dear lady nurtured us and walked us through that. Then she joyfully joined us in caring for our newborn son, Chris. Here we were first-time parents in another country in another culture, and she went beyond the call of duty in caring for us. She was very special to us.

Years before, the missionaries had brought down a dishwasher from the United States and set it up in their house. But Carmen resolutely refused to use the dishwasher. We tried to encourage her, but she would say, "No, no, no. My way is better." I would see this dear lady, day after day, standing right next to the dishwasher over the sink scrubbing pots and pans. If I could have, I would have taken away her sink and forced her hand, so that she only had one option—the dishwasher.

Because God cares for us so much and because we are so dear to Him, 2000 years ago with the destruction of the temple, He took away our "sink" and He forced our hand. No longer were we going to be able to go to a building and go through certain rituals to find God. God said, "No. You'll find Me in a personal relationship." And friends, as followers of Jesus, you and I have the privilege and yes, the responsibility of letting people know about that.

Like our passage, we live in a time of confusion today. There are a lot of ideas popping up about where you find God? And there are all kinds of theories floating around. We are planting North Pointe Community Church to help clear up the confusion. We want to be about the mission of telling people God is no longer found in buildings and He's no longer found in ritual. He's found in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. God is personal.

As many of you know, these last three or four weeks we have been having our drive to see who will commit to being with us at the north church plant, and I'm very encouraged. We have 160 or so adults that have said, "Yes, I want to be a part." We're getting to work with a number of wonderful, qualified people.

One of those couples is Jared and Lindsey Harms, who are going to be heading up the youth ministry at North Pointe. They're a dynamic young couple and they are way out in front planning this thing, and I love to see them interact with junior and senior highers. I'd like you to hear from them briefly about how they came to know God and, more importantly, their passion for helping junior high and senior high youth encounter God through Jesus Christ.

### **Video: Jared & Lindsey Harms, North Pointe Youth Ministry**

**Lindsey:** Growing up, my family were Christians, but we moved around a lot from Florida to Minnesota and everywhere in-between, and I just heard a lot of things about God from a lot of different people. But the first time that God became real to me—that I really feel like I encountered Him for myself—was when I went to camp when I was in junior high. I started to ask my camp counselor questions that I'd always thought about: "How do I really know God? How do I know He's in my life?" She answered those questions, and I started to read my Bible and pray for myself—not just with my parents and during Sunday School. It became real for me. And I really want to reach other kids in that way and impact kids in the way that my camp counselors and my youth pastors did, because that's a time when I feel kids are really starting to make their own decisions and they need some direction and someone just to come alongside them and show them how much God loves them.

**Jared:** Well, for me it definitely started in junior high and I still remember the day like it was yesterday. It was Paul [*Lucks*] coming up and saying, "I really see some leadership talent in you." I kind of took it at face value and didn't dwell on it too long, but as the next year came along (that was my freshman year) I really wanted to be able to serve God. And as Paul had kind of laid that in me, I decided, *You know, let's take a shot and go back to the junior high and serve in one area that impacted me.* And I loved it. It was a joy for me to teach them, to see them grasp a concept and to grow in their walk. As I look over the pictures I've been able to take from the time that we've played football with the kids, now two of them are wanting to serve in our youth group at North Pointe and one of them is taking on a core leadership position.

**Lindsey:** One of the biggest ways that stands out to me that I've seen my girls (that I've been serving) encounter God is through small groups. And that's something we really want to build into North Pointe as well. We were going over a lesson about relationships and about how you can love others like Christ, and these girls took it a step farther. They got so excited about it and they wanted to know how they could reach their friends in their schools and other sports and areas. I just encouraged them to start talking with them and developing relationships. Well, they started even inviting them to our group, and our group doubled in size—more than doubled in size—in the course of about a month because these girls were so on fire and so wanted to share what they were learning about God with their friends. I was able to see God use these girls to impact their friends, and I just really think that's a crucial part also—the relationship aspect that God uses.

**Jared:** When a student comes in, it's interesting, especially if they're coming in as a seventh grader, there are so many changes going on in their life. There are changes going on at home, there are changes going on at school, and they are looking to be accepted and encouraged. And as they walk into the church, the first thing they want to know is: Are they going to be loved? Is somebody going to like them? Is somebody going to encourage them? And as they walk into North Pointe, that is one of our biggest challenges and our biggest goals that we have—that they will feel welcome and that we will say, "You are normal with what you're going through; you are somebody that we love and somebody we can care for."

**Lindsey:** If you were to ask us why we want to go to north Lincoln, since Berean has so much stuff here—lots of resources, the new youth complex—I would say we really feel called to north Lincoln. That’s really what it’s all about and we’ve seen how God has worked in our lives and how God has worked in the students’ lives here and in other youth groups, and we are so excited to see how we are going to get to encounter God in new ways at North Pointe, and we’re waiting to see what’s going to happen.”

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Whether or not you decide to be a part of North Pointe Community Church, the privilege and responsibilities are incumbent upon us all to take the message to those who don’t know—to those who might be confused about: How do we find God?

I want to ask: Who can you call this week? Which people can you move towards to develop a relationship? Who in your neighborhood or who in your workplace can you deepen a friendship with, that you might in the course of that friendship share your experience with God—how you found God through Jesus Christ. I encourage you to be thinking and take a step this week. Just make a phone call. Set up a lunch. Set up a coffee. Do something to help move people who haven’t come to know God towards Jesus Christ.

As we return to our passage in Mark 13, Jesus lets the disciples know the destruction of the temple is at hand. Verse 28:

**“Now learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. Even so, you too, when you see these things happening, recognize that He is near, right at the door.”**  
(vs. 28-29)

Jesus says, “Just as the leaves on the fig tree tells that summer is near, when you see the sacrilege in the temple going on you know that destruction is at hand.” I said that the interpretation of this passage is difficult. The wording for “He is near” is ambiguous. It could be translated “*He* is near” or “*It* is near.” If you have the New American Standard Version it says “He.” If you have the New International Version it says “It is near.” Since the pronoun is not there, then the interpreter is left to speculate what verses 28-30 are referring to. Are they referring to the destruction of the temple, described in verses 5-23? Or are they referring to the return of Jesus, described in verses 24-27?

In my opinion, the structural analysis shows that verses 28-30 are more closely linked to verses 5-23—the destruction of the temple. In fact, I would suggest to you that in verse 4 the question that is driving this whole discussion is: When is this going to happen?—“this” being the destruction of the temple. In fact, verse 30 it backs this up. It says:

**“Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.”**

One way to understand “this generation” is that it is referring to the people who are alive at the time of Jesus—His contemporaries. We can also take “this generation” as a reference to the generation alive when these events take place. I think verses 28-30 are a warning: “It is at hand. Be watching for the signs.” And then if any would think to doubt Jesus’ word, in verse 31 He lets them know it is the most sure thing. He says:

**“Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.”**

He says, “You get up and you expect to see the heavens and earth. But I want to tell you there’s something more sure, and that is My word.”

Then in verse 32 Jesus returns to the subject of His return. He says:

**“But of that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone [when it comes to My return, nobody knows].**

And then He gets to the application. What is it we need to be focusing on as we think about the return of Jesus?

**“Take heed, keep on the alert [there’s that call again]; for you do not know when the appointed time will come. It is like a man away on a journey, who upon leaving his house and putting his slaves in charge, assigning to each one his task, also commanded the doorkeeper to stay on the alert. Therefore, be on the alert—for you do not know when the master of the house is coming, whether in the evening, at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning—in case he should come suddenly and find you asleep.”** (vs. 33-36)

Friends, as it relates to His return, I don’t think Jesus is concerned with our timelines and trying to figure out what event will happen when. Here is what He wants, when it comes to His return: He wants us to be alert, to be ready; it could happen today. In case we didn’t get it from the parable, He says it again in verse 37:

**“What I say to you I say to all, ‘Be on the alert!’ ”**

I think this is application for us individually and corporately. Individually, let me ask: If Jesus were to show up this afternoon, would you be embarrassed? Would there be parts of your life that you want to make right? Would there be a relationship you wish that you had bridged? If so, may I implore you: Do it now—because we don’t know when He’s coming back. It could be soon.

For us corporately, part of being alert as it relates to the imminent return of Jesus is that we take seriously the mission of making the gospel known. That’s why we’re planting North Pointe Community Church. That’s why you keep hearing again and again and again from us, “Will you move towards your neighbors and your friends?” That’s why we’re pushing ahead in India and other places around the world. We don’t know how much time we have. Our time could be short. So yes, there’s an urgency about what we do as far as taking the gospel out.

On the other hand, Jesus’ return could be a thousand years away; we don’t know the day. So we plan for the future. We plan for future growth. That’s why we’re building a new auditorium so that we may see thousands more come to Christ, if He should tarry a long time.

This past January in the State of the Church message, when Bryan laid out the idea that we’re going to plant a church and build a new auditorium, he said, “People tell me I’m crazy.” And I say to them, “We’re just a *little* crazy.” But I don’t think we’re crazy. I think we’re living the tension of Jesus’ return. It could be soon, so we live with the sense of urgency. It could be a thousand years away, so we plan for the future.

Recently I was reading about a surprising result from the movie *Bruce Almighty*. In the movie God is trying to contact Jim Carrey, a newspaperman who is angry with Him and made his complaints known. Apparently when God’s number appears on Jim Carrey’s pager, it also

appears on the screen. Do you know that all over America, using their home area code, people have tried to call God with that number? And it hasn't been a joke.

In Colorado there was a recording at that number. One lady called from jail saying, "God, I've messed up my life. If you'll get me out of jail so I can see my husband and kids, I promise I'll straighten out my life." Another message at the same number said, "Hey, God, I've done some really bad things in my life and I need to repent, so please answer my prayers." Across the country in New York, a lady working at this phone number came into her boss' office crying because a woman had called, begging God for His help because her husband was dying.

My friends, people are taking a phone number off a movie screen from *Bruce Almighty*, trying to get hold of God. What a great privilege and a great responsibility to tell them, "God is closer than a phone call. And it doesn't involve going to a building and going through a bunch of rituals. God can be known in a personal relationship through Jesus Christ."

So one more time I'll ask and answer our question: Where do we find God? Jesus Christ is the One through whom we find God. *Jesus Christ is the One through whom we find God.*

*God in heaven, we are grateful that no longer does finding You involve going to a building and going through specific rituals. We're thankful that You're closer than a phone call. Thank you, Jesus, for dying on a cross—that we could know You. But as Your followers, we realize we have a great responsibility and a great privilege, and that's to help clear up the confusion. Would You go before us? Would you superintend our conversations? Would you give us opportunities with neighbors and friends, that in a very safe way we can share our experience with You? You're not in a building; You're not in ritual; but You are in relationship. God, give us that avenue, we pray. In the name of Jesus our Savior, Amen.*

Note: This transcript reflects clarification added to clear up some confusion related to the original message delivered on April 16/17, 2005.

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April 16/17, 2005

**Study Questions**  
*The Good News About Jesus According to Mark*  
**Looking for God**  
**Mark 13:1-37**  
Pastor Andy MacFarlane

**Opening Discussion**

1. Are you surprised that people would call a phone number from the movie *Bruce Almighty* or write to a web site to try and find God? Why or why not?
2. When have you been most desperate to find God? What did you do to try and find Him?

**Bible Study**

1. Read Mark 13:1-13. What do you think was going through the minds of the disciples when Jesus told them the temple would be destroyed? What was the significance of the temple?

Why do you think Jesus included so many warnings to be vigilant in this passage?

Why do you think times of crisis are good opportunities for false prophets?

As a whole, in the last 10 years, do you think the Christian community has overreacted to contemporary events, like the war in Iraq, September 11, natural disasters, the new millennium, etc.?

2. Read Mark 13:14-23. What runs through your mind after reading these verses?

What is the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION?

Why do you think Jesus chose to use apocalyptic language from the Book of Daniel in describing the destruction of Jerusalem?

In Mark 13:21-23, why do you think Jesus repeats the warning about false messiahs and prophets?

Read Mark 13:24-27. Even though Jesus was focused on the destruction of the temple, why do you think He included words about His return? How is Jesus a replacement for the temple?

3. Read Mark 13:28-31. How do these verses relate to the question the disciples asked in 13:4? What is Jesus' purpose in warning the disciples about the imminent destruction of the temple?

Read Mark 13:32-37. According to these verses, when will Jesus return?

How are we to respond to the possibility of Jesus' imminent return?

## **Application**

1. How does God demonstrate His goodness in the destruction of the temple?

With the death and resurrection of Jesus and the destruction of the temple, what changed in humankind's search for God?

Can you give examples from your neighbors, friends or family members of people who are confused about how to find God? What can you do to help them?

2. Would you be embarrassed if Jesus returned today? If so, what steps do you need to take to get ready for His return?