



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Mark 13: 14-27

Mark

"The 70th Week and the 2nd Coming"

TRANSCRIPT

Well, our passage is Mark chapter 13. And we're going to look this morning at verses 14 through 27. Mark 13, beginning with 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. 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 cloak. 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. 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. 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. 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 astray. But take heed; behold, I have told you everything in advance.

"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 the 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."

May the Lord bless this reading of His word and bless our time of study in it together. Shall we bow in a word of prayer?

[Prayer] Our gracious heavenly Father, we come to You with grateful hearts, hearts of praise because through the work of Your Son, by Your electing grace, we are Your people. We are a people that have been saved for eternity. And we praise You and thank You that our salvation is not something that's grounded in ourselves. It's grounded in the personal work of Your Son which is infallible. His finished work. Nothing has been left undone. We are secure in Him. Our salvation both now and in the future is certain. Not only is our salvation certain, but our deliverance in the future, the coming our Lord is a certain hope that we have. And as we look at that this morning, we ask that You would bless it to our understanding, and encourage us with it, and give us perspective on His life. It's not just a curiosity, Father, that we can enter into and discuss and think about, but this has a very practical, a very ethical, a very moral influence upon our life. We are to live in light of the day in which Your Son will again appear. Maybe in our lifetime. Maybe not be. But we are to live in light of it, and I pray that You would help us to do that, and to set our priorities in life according to that. That this world is a world that is coming to an end. The world is passing away, John tells us. But Your kingdom is eternal, and it is coming. Your Son will bring it. And with His coming, He will bring His reward. May we be found when He comes worthy of that reward. So we pray that You would use the time together to instill these principles and this perspective in our mind.

And Lord, we also take the time to remember those who are in need and those who are suffering in one way or another. Those who are in physical need, we pray that You'd give healing. Those who are struggling spiritually, give them strength in the midst of their struggle. We pray for those who labor that You'd give them strength that they would labor well. And we think of the men who are supporting their families, and we'd pray that You'd bless their labors, that they might support their families well. And give prosperity to their work. And in the doing of that, we pray, Father, that You'd give them grateful hearts, that they might seek to serve You faithfully and well.

We pray, Lord, for our church. We pray that You'd bless it. We pray for all of those who labor here. We pray for the secretaries, the janitors. We pray that You'd

give them strength in the doing of their work, and we pray the same for the deacons, and we pray for the elders, that You'd give them strength and wisdom in the tasks that You have given to them.

Bless this assembly, that its testimony will be strong today, and tomorrow, and throughout the years to come. May we be true to Your word, and may we proclaim it well, and may we as a people live in conformity to it.

We pray for our nation, and pray that You'd bless our leaders with wisdom, and bless, if it please You, our nation with prosperity. Most of all, Lord, we pray that You'd bless it with an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, that multitudes would turn to Your Son and turn and repentance and believe in Him as their Savior. We pray You'd bless us now, as we sing our final hymn. May it be a joyful experience, and may it be a time that prepares our heart for the ministry of the word. And may You open our hearts to the truth of this passage. We pray these things in our Savior's name. Amen.

[Message] "It was the best of times. It was the worst of times. It was the spring of hope. It was the winter of despair." You'll recognize those as the opening lines of Charles Dickens' "A Tale of Two Cities," and his description of life during the days, and just preceding the days of the French Revolution. But, those lines could just as easily be applied to our own day, a day in which many live in fabulous wealth, while many others live in abject poverty. An age in which there is an explosion of knowledge, yet people are relatively ignorant of the Bible, and of sound doctrine, and show very little interest in learning any of that, and even that seems to be the case in many churches today.

We are a nation at peace abroad, and yet a country polarized by deep economic and social divisions that threaten to erupt in violence. The comparisons that we make could go on and yet it's enough to say that for all of the advantages that we enjoy in this last decade of the 20th century, there are many uncertainties. In fact, the whole of society seems to be in a state of flux. Things seem to be getting worse.

So, we can't help but wonder what the future holds. But fortunately, the Bible tells us what the future holds, and it's more of the same, and even more so. Either in the near future or the far future, days will come which will be in the absolute sense, the best of times and the worst of times. The worst of times because they will be times of war, pestilence, persecution, such as the world has never known. The best of

times because they will be the days when the Lord returns to deliver His people, His elect, and establish justice and a kingdom on the earth.

That's our hope. And that's our subject this morning, the second coming of our Lord, and the climactic events of history leading up to it. To borrow again from Dickens, and from Augustin, it's the story of two great cities: the City of God and the City of Man, and the triumph of the one over the other.

The Lord and His disciples have gathered on the Mount of Olives across from the city of Jerusalem, and there, He has been answering their questions regarding the destruction of the temple. When it will occur, and what the signs of his coming and the end of the age will be. In response, He has given a number of signs. Wars, famines, earthquakes, persecution. Conditions that will precede His coming, but which also characterize history from AD 70 on to the very end. In fact, we could say conditions that have characterized history all along, since the fall of man. And so, His answer has been rather general.

None of these signs are specific enough to date the Lord's return. They are, as He said, the beginning of birth pangs. But with verse 14, He becomes very specific when He speaks of the "abomination of desolation." Now, this will be the one great event that will point with clarity to our Lord's return at the end of the age when a certain man, a man of great power and authority, will arise and be the epitome of godlessness.

Paul calls him the "man of sin," or the "man of lawlessness." John calls him the "antichrist." And his coming was foretold by Daniel. In fact, it's from Daniel that the expression "abomination of desolation" is drawn. It occurs in Daniel chapter 9, in Daniel chapter 11, and in chapter 12. And so, clearly that forms the background of our Lord's words in Mark chapter 13, and specifically, Daniel's prophecy of the 70 weeks recorded in Daniel 9, verses 24 through 27 in which he gives a chronological framework of prophecy regarding the Messiah in His first and in His second coming.

Let's take just a few minutes to briefly review that passage. Because, as I said, it is background material for what our Lord has to say in Matthew, or rather in Mark chapter 13. And Daniel 9, prophetic history is developed according to a series of weeks. And each week represents a unit of seven years. So, 70 weeks of years. And Daniel prophesies that beginning with the decree to rebuild Jerusalem, after the

Babylonian captivity, until Messiah the Prince, there will be 79 weeks, which equals 483 years.

Now, what did he mean by that expression? "Until Messiah the Prince." Is he speaking of the time when Messiah would be born, or is it some other event in His life? Well, 100 years ago, Sir Robert Anderson, working with that figure of 483 years, and with the Jewish calendar, the ancient Jewish calendar which figured years according to 360 days, as did the ancient eastern calendars, calculated the leap years that would've taken place or did take place then, and showed in his book, "The Coming Prince," that from the decree of Artaxerxes, the Persian king to rebuild Jerusalem, recorded in Nehemiah chapter 2, to the day of the Lord's triumphal entry, there was exactly 483 years to the day.

So, "until Messiah the Prince" means: until Christ comes to Jerusalem and presents Himself to the nation as the nation's king, as the nation's Messiah. After that, Daniel writes, the Messiah will be cut off. Cut off from life. Crucified. And the people of the prince, he says, a prince who is yet to come, a future prince. His people will destroy the city and the sanctuary, a reference to the Romans and their destruction of the temple in AD 70.

Then, in verse 27, Daniel writes of the 70th week, and the prince, who will arise at that time. Nothing in history fits the description of this week, which suggests that the prophetic calendar stopped with the 69th week, and the 70th week is yet future. The prince, evidently a Gentile, or perhaps a Roman, since his people destroyed Jerusalem, will be a very skillful politician because he will make a covenant with the Jewish people ensuring peace in a land that's desperate for peace.

But in the middle of this week, some three, three and a half years into it, he will break the covenant. He will put a stop to sacrifice, Daniel writes. And on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate. Now, that's how my text has it, which is the New American Standard Bible. But if you have the New International version, it reads a little differently. And I think in a helpful translation, it says, "On a wing of the temple." He will set up an abomination that causes desolation until the end. That is decreed. It is poured out on him.

Now, this is where our passage begins in Mark 13 in verse 14, with one who, by his abomination, makes desolate. Or, the abomination of desolation. The Lord says, 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." The Lord says that the abomination will be standing where it should not be, and our text, in Mark's text, that's a bit vague. Where is this place that it should not be?

And yet, if we go back to other passages, in Daniel, for example, in Daniel chapter 11 and verse 31, it makes it very clear that it's the temple that he is speaking of. Because there, Daniel writes that the abomination of desolation will desecrate the sanctuary. Fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy is sometimes explained in regard to Antiochus IV, also known as Antiochus Epiphanes, the Syrian king and general who, during the time of the Maccabees in the second century BC made war on the Jewish people, and defiled the temple by setting up a pagan altar over the altar of burnt offering.

That event does seem to be in the background of our Lord's words. It forms a very good picture of what is coming because his expression, abomination of desolation is not only used in the Book of Daniel., but it's also used in the Book of Maccabees to specifically describe Antiochus and what he did. And Daniel 9 clearly goes beyond Antiochus in its fulfillment, and beyond our Lord. Because the Lord says, or rather, Daniel says in verse 27 that this abomination occurs after Messiah has been cut off after His death. That seems to be the reason that the Lord says in the middle of verse 14, "Let the reader understand." That is, let the reader of Daniel understand that the abomination of desolation has not yet occurred. It was not fulfilled in Antiochus.

And yet, because it has not yet occurred, people should beware. People should be on the alert, because one is coming, a man like Antiochus, a powerful man, a blasphemous man who will make war on the Jewish people and will defile the temple. There are some who have tried to identify this prophecy with the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD and have seen the abomination in the standards that the Roman soldiers carried. And they carried standards that had the imperial eagle on them, which had idolatrous associations, and this is how they have seen this prophecy fulfilled.

And in Luke chapter 21 and verse 20, the Lord does say: "When you see Jerusalem surrounded by enemies, recognize that her desolation," and that's the key word, "her desolation is at hand."

There are, however, some I think serious problems with that interpretation and identifying the abomination with the Roman standards. Because remember, this is going to be a key event that's going to tell them when the Lord is coming. And yet, there was nothing particularly surprisingly about Roman standards because they had been introduced by the Romans into the city of Jerusalem on a number of occasions.

Plus, in Matthew's account, the abomination occurs in the temple, not around the city. And further, the grammar of our verse speaks very much to this point and speaks of a specific purpose, rather, a specific person that the Lord has in mind. Because the word "standing" is a singular masculine participle which can be translated as the Greek grammarian AT Robertson has translated it: "When you see the abomination of desolation standing where he ought not to be." So, it clearly seems to be referring to a specific man, a future person, in the temple. And all of that fits quite well with what Paul says in 2 Thessalonians chapter 2 verses 3 and 4 where he assures the Thessalonians that the coming of the Lord wouldn't occur until the apostasy comes first, which occurs when the man of sin, or the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who he then describes as one who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God displaying himself as being God.

John describes the same thing in Revelation 13 verses 11 through 15 where the image of the beast, the antichrist, is set up in the temple. So, all of this seems very clearly I think to suggest that the Lord is speaking of events that are yet future, and closely connected with His second coming, during an age when the temple is rebuilt.

Well, what should be their response to this when they see this abomination in the future? The Lord says that when they see it, see the abomination, they should flee to the mountains. In fact, the need to flee is so urgent that the Lord warns that people on their housetops should not take the time to go down into their houses to get anything, but should just flee. And those who are in the fields doing work should not turn back even to get their cloak, but should flee. It's that urgent. And, He expresses great concern and compassion because these days will be very serious and severe, and he has compassion for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing children. He says, "Pray that it not happen in the winter." Or on the Sabbath, as He adds in Matthew's account.

Now again, some find difficulty in locating this in the end time, and so they interpret this as a description of events that will unfold, or did unfold around 70 AD. Now, one writer says "this admonition would have no significance to dwellers in the 20th century homes or houses, for it describes a situation peculiar to Jerusalem." And I think what he means by that is peculiar to Jerusalem of the first century.

And yet, all of this fits very easily within a contemporary scene in modern Israel. People today still work in fields, work on the farm or on the kibbutz. It's a very agrarian culture. They have flat grooves on which a lot of activity takes place. When I was living in Israel, I used to frequently go up on the roof. A lot of activity took place there. While I was a student, I had guard duty periodically. I would go up and keep watch for terrorists and keep the university safe from invasion. I wanted to carry an UZI but they wouldn't let me. I thought I might shoot a tourist or something. But, you could stand up there and move from one building to another and get a panoramic view of the city. That's the way the buildings are constructed today.

As you may know, the Sabbath is still in effect in Israel. There is a very influential religious community that ensures that on the Sabbath, all commerce and all travel comes to a stop. And so, these events fit very well with a contemporary scene in Israel. But more importantly, Matthew associates the Lord's return very closely with these events. There, the Lord states that He will come immediately after the tribulation of those days. It must then look to the future. This cannot be a description of what occurred in 70 AD because the Lord did not come immediately following those days. We are looking at things that are yet to come.

And I think a further proof of that is found in verse 19 where he describes those days, those days as John puts it, which are the great tribulation, as being unique. 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 shall. It's very difficult to identify that with the events of 70 AD. As bad as those events were, and Josephus gives very shocking description of what went on in the city of Jerusalem at that time, claiming over a million people were killed. A figure that some think is inflated. Josephus is a bit notorious for exaggerating figures such as that. But even if it's accurate, over a million people were killed. Is that greater than the Jewish Holocaust that occurred in Auschwitz or Dachau? Buchenwald? The various death camps throughout Europe in which over six million Jews were killed. It could hardly

be said that what the Romans did was a greater disaster than what the Nazis of Germany did in our own day.

But the Lord says that days are coming which are going to be even worse, even worse than what occurred in the 1940s and the year 70. A time of tribulation such as has not occurred and never shall, He says. So intense that we read in verse 20, " Unless the Lord had shortened those days, no life would have been saved." But because of His elect, He will shorten them.

That underscores a very important point, and that point is that the Lord is the one who is in control of events. Not the antichrist to come, not the world powers then or now, but the Lord Himself. And with that confidence, His people will be able to look to Him, to look to the Lord as a sovereign of history and know that He will come, He will intervene in the right time, in the right day.

Now, let's apply that to our own day, because while this is a future day that we're reading about here, and we're studying, it has principles that I think are very applicable today. And the first principle is this: if the Lord is going to intervene in the affairs of His people at the most critical crisis, the most severe crisis of their history, can He not intervene in the lesser crises that you and I go through day to day? Can we not have the same confidence that He will intervene at the right time in our lives? That the one who is in control of history and is moving it to His appointed end, and the glorious return of His son, is He not in control of every minute of our lives right now? And can we not look to Him for comfort and the assurance that He will intervene?

I think that's the first principle. But the second principle is this: while we do live in very difficult days in very trying times, we're not to be looking at the days. We're not to be concerned with the circumstances and the situation. You go to the Book of Hebrews and you see this. The Jewish Hebrews of the first century were living in very trying times, more so than the days in which we live. The author of Hebrews brings that out, and it was testing their faith. And in describing the difficulties, he says that they were difficult days, but they had not yet resisted to the point of the shedding of blood. But that was in the future, or that was a prospect. That might occur. And so it was very disturbing to them. It challenged their faith, and some of them were wavering a bit.

And so what does he do? What does he tell them to do? Well, first of all in chapter 11, he gives them a list of the heroes of the faith, those who have been faithful to the Lord in the most difficult of times, and how the Lord was faithful to them. And then in chapter 12, he urges them not to look at the circumstance, not to evaluate their situation, figure out the wisest thing to do. Rather, he says to them, fix your eyes on Jesus. Think of Him. Trust in Him. That's what we're to do.

Now, we do live in troubling times, and we need to be aware of that and evaluate these days wisely, and plan our lives according to the dangers and the prospects of these days, and plan wisely. And I think as citizens, we should do what we can to change these days and make this a better place. But our hope is not in ourselves; it's not in our abilities. It's in the Lord, and we're to be looking to Him. We're to look to Him and live by faith in His word and expect Him to guide and to protect, and even to intervene in our situation.

We can have confidence in Him to do that because He's proven Himself in the past. That's what the author of Hebrews is pointing out to his Jewish believers. He's saying: look at what He's done in the past, and he reviews this great list of men and women who were faithful to the Lord and to whom He was faithful. We can know that He's going to be faithful in the future. He'll be faithful in the future in the greatest day of affliction. And so we can know that He's faithful in the present and have that confidence.

Now, that future deliverance will occur. He will cut short those days when He comes again. And, that's when things are going to be put straight. That's when justice is going to be established and society's going to be made the way it should be: righteous. Not through the work of politicians, and not through the efforts of the church, but Jesus Christ Himself will intervene in history, and He will change things.

That's what He now describes in verses 21 through 27. He begins in verses 21 and 22 with another warning not to be deceived by all the false prophets and false Christs that will arise at that time. Many coming in His name saying "I am He." He warned about that earlier, but He repeats the warning because evidently, in the latter days, the problem would become even more acute. There'd be more of these kinds of people and more things of that nature. So acute, in fact, that these false Christs and false prophets will do signs and wonders so effectively that if it were possible, they would lead even the elect astray. In other words, they will be so effective that they

will come within a hair of deceiving the elect themselves, those who have the Holy Spirit.

Now, He says, "But take heed; behold, I have told you everything in advance." I think in saying that, He's saying: you paid attention to the Word of God in order not to be deceived, because I'm telling you about these things. And as you pay attention to the Scriptures, then you will be wise, because those are going to be days in which men will need to have a great deal of discernment. That's what I think Paul is describing in 2 Thessalonians 3 where he writes of the man of sin, the man of lawlessness, the antichrist coming in league with Satan and with all power and signs and false wonders. So, he will come with great deceptive powers.

John describes what he and the false prophet will do in Revelation 13 when they perform evidently some kind of simulated miracles, excellent deceptions on their part. The false prophet, you'll remember, calls down fire from heaven. Then, apparently, causing the beast who has been slain, apparently slain, to be resurrected. We're not told how they pull all of this off, but they do it with extraordinary deception. We do know that it's deception, and it will call for a great deal of discernment on the part of God's people.

This is very interesting, I think, and in principle, it speaks to our own day, because there are a lot of people today that claim to be doing miracles. We may not be able to explain those miracles, but the fact that we can't explain them doesn't mean that they're genuine. I think we sometimes have a problem with this. We hear about something, and we don't know how to explain it. Therefore we think, must be genuine. Well, not so. What's very clear from the Lord's words is that false miracles can be done. Now, I'm not saying that God doesn't do miracles in this age in which we live. I believe that He does. I'm suggesting that when I say that He will intervene in our own experiences, and He may do that in miraculous ways. We pray for miracles. We pray for His blessing.

But, many things that are claimed as miracles are not genuine miracles. Not everything that is said to be a miracle is a miracle. Not everything that appears to be a miracle is a miracle. And not everything that's done in Christ's name is truly of Christ. And not all of the life-changing claims that are made, that are attributed to such things, are genuine. It's often a very weighty kind of evidence for the

genuineness of the things we hear going around us. It changed a person's life. They're full of joy, and these kinds of things.

Well, Don Carson, who is professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School writes on this very point in the book, "Power Religion." He says: "The question is not, first of all, whether the miracle reported by the Vineyard movement are real, though that is an important question, nor even whether people are drawn to renewed love for Jesus. There are, after all, many Jesuses around. The Mormon Jesus, the Jehovah's Witness Jesus, the Muslim Jesus, the classical liberal Jesus, and so forth. The question, rather, is whether the movement draws men and women to renewed love for the Jesus of God's great redemptive historical act: the Jesus of the cross and resurrection." In other words, we measure these things not by a person's claim to be devoted to the Lord, but what Lord are they devoted to? And you know that by reading the Word of God. And you're able to analyze a circumstance by the Word of God.

Great deceptions can occur and do occur. That's why the Lord says, "I have told you everything in advance," so you'll know these things and be prepared. That tells us, again, as I mentioned a moment ago, that the basis for judging our experiences and the experiences of others is not experience. It's not what we see. It's not what we hear. It's the Word of God. And the Lord has spoken plainly to that. And as for our devotion to the Lord and our love for the Lord, we don't gain that by experiences, though God will use experiences in our life, no doubt about that. But fundamentally, it's the Word of God that generates that love and affection for Him.

Recently, I have been reading a book on four of the reformers. And so far, I have read about Luther, Huldrych Zwingli, and John Calvin. And one of the things that I've been greatly impressed about these men and the reformation as a whole is that the strength of the Reformation was built upon the preaching of the Word of God. One of the great watchwords of the Reformation was *sola scriptura*, and you saw that in the lives of those men. And all of the pulpits of the reformed men, they were preaching the Word of God.

On January 1st, 1519, in Zurich, Huldrych Zwingli stood up before a congregation at Gross Munster cathedral, the Great Munster church in Zurich, and he announced that no longer would he be following the liturgy of the Roman Catholic church and the canned sermons that he was to give. But he was going to begin

preaching through the Word of God. And he began that day with the Book of Matthew, began with chapter 1 and went through the genealogy, and went all the way through the book, and through the rest of the New Testament. And when he finished the New Testament, he went to the Old Testament. And as he preached through the Word of God, the church was filled with people who wanted to hear it, and the city was won over to the reformation. And the same throughout Switzerland and other places.

Go over to Geneva, and Calvin, years later, began doing the same thing. He was called to Geneva unwillingly, but he went, and he began preaching the Word of God. And it was so strong that the people exiled him from the city. So he went to Strasbourg where he had a very influential ministry. Three years later, the people Geneva wanted him back, and they called him back to Geneva, and he returned, and his first Sunday in the pulpit, he began right where he left off three years earlier, preaching through the Scriptures.

It is the Bible that gives us the wisdom that we need in these days of deception. The Reformation was no different. They had the radical reformation in which there were many people claiming to be prophets, and claiming to be Christ, and things of that nature. And yet, those who understood it, who had the wisdom to understand it with those who had based their understanding on the Word of God.

Well, days of deception are going to come in a greater way in the future that will increase. And along with the deceptions will come claims that Christ has arrived. "Behold," they will say, "here is the Christ;" or, "Behold, He is here." But the Lord says in verse 23, take heed. In other words, don't be deceived by any such claims. When He comes, there will be no doubt about it.

And Matthew, the Lord says that His coming like a bolt of lightning flashing from the east to the west, and it will be visible everywhere and to everyone. When He comes, there will be no mistaking what is happening. It won't take place in a corner somewhere. It won't take place in some obscure town in Texas. It's going to occur in a very obvious, very dramatic way, when a great cosmic shaking of the heavens takes place.

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." These are descriptions that are taken

from the Old Testament, and sometimes are associated with the destruction of great empires, ancient empires. That would certainly be involved with our Lord's return. Godless empires, the City of Man will collapse at His return.

But it's more than that. It's more than a metaphor that He is giving us here. His appearing will be marked by real signs in the sky, which shouldn't surprise us, which I really think we should expect, because we're speaking here of the return to earth of the Son of God, a unique event which we might expect to be accompanied by unique events. And, after all, His first coming was announced by a star in the sky. We might expect that His second coming will be preceded by heavenly disturbances. And these will be the climactic birth pangs.

He's described the beginning of birth pangs; these will be the conclusion of them. "Then," verse 26 states, "they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory." Matthew states that the sign of the Son of Man will appear at this time, and many have speculated what that sign might be. Many of the church fathers thought it would be a cross that would appear in the sky. And some modern commentators have thought that that has some merit. Others have thought this might be the Shekinah glory that will fill the heavens.

I think it's probably more likely that what we have is an explanation of that sign in Mark's gospel. What he's saying is the sign, he doesn't mention the sign, but the sign that is mentioned in Matthew is the coming of the Lord Himself, His appearing is the sign. That sight of Him will have an amazing effect upon Israel and be the occasion for the repentance of that nation. Because the Lord says in Matthew that when they see the sign, when they see Him coming on the clouds, all the tribes of the earth will mourn.

Now, that's a quotation from Zechariah chapter 12 and verse 10. And in Zechariah, it is not the earth that mourns, but it is the land, the land of Israel. That is probably how we should understand it here, because the word that's translated "earth" is the Greek word "*gaea*," which sometimes does mean the whole earth. But when the land of Israel is in view, it's the word that's used for that. The word that's used for Israel. And that's what Zechariah 12 verses 10 through 12 is about: the future revival of the Jewish people in the land. When Zechariah says, "God will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the spirit of grace and supplication so that they will look on me, whom they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as

one mourns for an only son, and the land will mourn every family by itself. Not with the mourning of despair, but with the mourning of repentance that results from the outpouring of God's spirit of grace.

This is when, as Paul says in Romans chapter 11 verse 26, "All Israel will be saved." There will be many who are saved during the tribulation period. You see that in Revelation chapter 7. 144,000 out of Israel and a great multitude from the nations. But the final salvation of the nation will take place when they see Him coming in the clouds. That's when they will see the one whom they put to death. Their eyes will be open to the truth of it that He is the Messiah, they will mourn over that, they will mourn over their rejection, they will repent of that, and they will trust in Him.

As I said, it'll be a time when many Gentiles, no doubt, will come to faith as well. As he says in verse 27, "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." God's elect from all over the earth, from every age. Old Testament saints from heaven, New Testament saints, saints throughout the ages. All of His elect will be gathered into His glorious kingdom. Then will come about the greatest blessing on earth. The night of antichrist will end. The dawn of our Lord will begin. The City of God will triumph over the City of Man, and it will become the best of times. That's our great hope, and the goal of history. A glorious end with the Lord's return in judgment on the wicked and deliverance for His people.

Is it near at hand? Are we in the last days? Is Daniel's 70th week about to begin? I don't know, and no one does, and it's not very helpful really to speculate very much on that. But we should be looking for and praying for our Lord's return. Remembering what Paul said when he wrote to the Romans, "Now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed." With every passing moment, it grows nearer. The apostles lived with that expectation, with that hope. John called his day the "last hour." That was some 2,000 years ago. We've moved quite a bit away from that. The prophetic clock, so to speak, has moved on, further along. And so, salvation certainly is nearer to us than when we believed. And we should be living as though it were at hand. Living our lives in light of the certainty of that coming. And doing as Paul urged the Roman believers when he wrote to them and said, "Let us therefore lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light."

We certainly live in days that need committed Christians. Discerning Christians, Christians who are wearing the armor of light, knowing the Scriptures, living by the Scriptures, living by faith. And in living in that way, and making it our ambition to please God. We should remember that when He comes again, He will come with His reward, eternal rewards that will be given to all of His people whom He finds doing His work and wearing His armor.

Are you doing that? Are you living in light of His coming? Are you living as though this world is just going to keep going on and on, your life is just going to keep going on and on? That's an illusion. Because one thing is certain, and we see that here: the day is coming when our Lord is going to return. He's going to end this world as we know it, and He's going to establish His kingdom. We should be looking forward to that and living our life in light of it. That should be our prayer, a prayer that God would instill within our hearts, those desires and that affection for His appearing and looking forward to Him, because history is moving on God's course. We are right where God would have us to be. We are right on His prophetic schedule. And that schedule will soon reach its glorious end.

If you know Christ as savior, then that's your hope. And it's the hope of only those who know Christ as Savior, the kingdom of God will be inherited by those who believe in Jesus Christ. Do you believe in Him? Are you trusting in Him as your Savior and as your Lord?

We began our study this morning with a quote from the opening lines of Charles Dickens' "A Tale of Two Cities." That story concludes with something of a Christian theme. Because it ends with the hero of the story laying down his life for another man. It's during the reign of terror in Paris, a time when many when men and women and children were being led off to execution under the guillotine. And in the story, one Charles Darnay has been imprisoned. He's an innocent man, but he's been sentenced to death, and he's found that he has no influence with the tribunal. He's made appeals, and they've been rejected, and now his death is certain.

Well, it's the day of his death when a friend, Sydney Carton, enters into his cell. And by a ruse, he's able to anesthetize his friend and then remove him from the cell, and then he exchanges places with that friend and goes to the execution in his place. His death was the means of the other man's freedom.

We too have obtained freedom in the same way, because one has taken our place, has exchanged places in judgment with us, and substituted His life for ours, and the greatest judgment, the greatest execution, the eternal judgment of the cross. And it's by trusting in Christ as the one who took your place in judgment that we, that you, that all who put their faith in Him obtain the forgiveness of sin and life everlasting.

If you've never believed in Christ who died in the place of sinners and who was coming again to judge the living and the dead, then I urge you to look to Him, trust in Him, trust in no one but Him, and know that He will be found faithful. To gain for you the forgiveness of sin now and that place in the kingdom to come. May God help you to look to Him, and may God help each of us to keep our eyes focused on Christ, the author and perfected of faith. Let's stand now for the benediction.

[Prayer] Gracious heavenly Father, we do thank You for the time that we have had to study this great passage of Scripture that reminds us that history does have a goal. And it is a goal that is going to be reached in Your time and in Your way. You are in control of history, and we are to look to You and trust in You and know that all things are working according to Your plan. The day will come, regardless of what we suffer in the present, the day will come when we will enter into a glorious kingdom that is far beyond anything we have been able to comprehend. We thank You for that and pray that You would instill within our hearts that hope and give us the desire to see His appearing. We pray that that will come. We look forward to the return of Your son. We pray that if there be any in attendance this morning who do not know Christ as Savior, that You would give them the conviction of their sin, open their eyes to see their need, and to look to Christ, who is the Savior. We pray these things in His name. Amen.