

This Easter, We Worry (Mark 13:1-10)

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[0 : 0 0] Cool. So actually this week there's a little bit of a surprise. We are not going to continue with Genesis for now. We're actually going to read Mark chapter 13. So if you guys could open your Bibles. I'll be reading the whole chapter, but today William will be preaching from a part of it. So if you would like to follow, please do.

As Jesus was leaving the temple that day, one of his disciples said, Teacher, look at these magnificent buildings. Look at the impressive stones and the walls. Jesus replies, Yes, look at these great buildings, but they will be completely demolished. Not one stone will be left on top of another. Later, Jesus said on the Mount of Olives across the valley from the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew came to him privately and asked him, Tell us when will all this happen? What sign will show us that these things are about to be fulfilled?

Jesus replied, Don't let anyone mislead you, for many will come in my name claiming I am the Messiah, they will deceive many. And you will hear of wars and threats of wars, but don't panic. Yes, these things must take place, but the end won't follow immediately. Nations will go to war against nations and kingdoms against kingdoms. There will be earthquakes in many parts of the world, as well as famines. But this is only the first of the birth pains with more to come. When these things begin to happen, watch out. You will be handed over to the local councils and beaten in the synagogues. You will stand trial before governors and kings because you are my followers. But this will be your opportunity to tell them about me. For the good news must first be preached to all nations. But when you are arrested and stand trial, don't worry in advance about what to say. Just say what God tells you at that time. For it is not you who will be speaking, but the Holy Spirit. A brother will betray his brother to death. A father will betray his own child. And the children will rebel against the parents and cause them to be killed. And everyone will hate you because you are my followers. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. The day is coming when you will see the sacrilegious standing where he should be. Then those in Judea must flee to the hills.

[2 : 1 9] A person out on the deck of the roof must go down into the house to pack. A person out in the field must not return even to get a coat. How terrible it will be for a pregnant woman and for nursing mothers in those days. And pray that your flight will not be in winter, for there will be greater anguish in those days than at any time since God created the world. And it will never be so great again. In fact, unless the Lord shortens the time of calamity, not a single person will survive.

But for the sake of his chosen ones, he has shortened those days. Then if anyone asks you, look, here is the Messiah, or there he is, don't believe it. For false messiahs and false prophets will rise up and perform signs and wonders so as to deceive, if possible, even God's chosen ones. Watch out. I have warned you about this ahead of time. At that time, after the anguish of those days, the sun will be darkened, the moon will give no light, the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers in heaven will be shaken. Then everyone will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds with great power and glory, and he will send out his angels to gather his chosen ones from all over the world, from the farthest end of the earth and heaven. Now learn a lesson from the fig tree. When its branches bud and its leaves begin to sprout, you know that summer is near. In the same way, when you see all these things taking place, you can know that his return is very near, right at the door.

I tell you the truth, this generation will not pass from the scene before all these things take place. Heaven and earth will disappear, but my words will never disappear. However, no one knows the day or hour when these things will happen, not even the angels in heaven or the Son himself, only the Father knows. And since you don't know when that time will come, be on guard, stay alert. The coming of the Son of Man will be illustrated by the story of a man going on a long trip. When he left home, he gave each of his slaves instruction about the work they were to do. And he told the

gatekeeper to watch for his return. You too must keep watch, for you don't know when the master of the household will return, in the evening, at midnight, before dawn, or at daybreak. Don't let him find you sleeping when he arrives without warning. I say to you what I say to everyone, watch for him. [4 : 28] Cool. And let's invite Pastor William. Good afternoon, everyone.

Thank you, Fran, for reading that passage. I do understand it is long and it has big words, but you did really well, so thank you. And actually, the reason we're in this passage is because I was just reading through my Bible, as many of you are doing, and it just really struck me how relevant this is, especially as we lead into Easter. But you may not see that, and that's okay.

But let's work on it together. Let's ask the Lord to show us what we can take out of this passage today. So let's pray together. Father, this Easter we worry, but help us to keep watch like we just heard. Help us to trust your timing, your plans. Help us to be on guard against all the different spiritual dangers in our lives. And Father, would you help us to keep focus on the task you've given to us, to share with our friends and family the wonderful news of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Father, we pray and ask all these things in Jesus' name. Amen. As Fran said, we've been journeying through the foundations, right, of Genesis chapters 1 to 6 so far.

And I hope you've really come away really just getting the basics about who God is, what He's like in character, and what we're like in response, and how despite our sin, His mercy is more.

[6 : 17] But I think each year as we approach Easter, it is worthwhile taking a short break to pause and reflect on one of the most important events in human history, if not the most important event, right? And it sits at the heart of our faith. Good Friday, Easter Sunday, and actually everything that happened right up in this holy week. And so if you remember last year, we talked about the event of Palm Sunday, right? We thought about and considered the King who was worthy.

As He walked into Jerusalem, they were crying out, Hosanna, which meant save us, Lord. And things are looking pretty optimistic if you have those lenses on, right? A crowd cheering on, a saviour, kind of feels like a country full of COVID zero confidence. And yet this year, this Easter, we worry, don't we? Perhaps you right now are even worried to be here. Will you get COVID? Will you pass it to your grandmother or father? Or maybe you're worried about what will happen at school now that everything's ramping up, okay? It's as if they're trying to treat you like COVID never happened and you have to catch up on so much in life. Or maybe you're stressing over work trauma. Maybe you've just had a fight with someone, a brother or sister, and you don't know how to resolve it. Maybe you're anxious about your children, some of you who are parents.

Some of you have family members who are on the brink, about to die, and they do not know Jesus as their Lord and saviour. Well, maybe there's nothing in particular that's worrying you. You just feel worried because everyone else around you is worried, right? You know, you look at the news and you're like, whoa, okay, I should feel worried too. Doomscrolling, all the news about COVID, okay? The horrible images coming out of Ukraine, increased costs of living, petrol prices, whatever. This Easter, I think, we worry. And it's okay, I think, to own that, to understand with each other that this is not a normal Easter time. It is an anxious one. So how might the Lord want us to respond?

And I think on first glance, this scene from Easter week might not seem to fit into what we would normally celebrate on Easter. But rather than, you know, like a welcome party that we kind of reflected on last year, this seems more like a bit of a pity party, right? A couple of disciples sitting on a rock with Jesus and they look over the city and they're being told all this bad news. How will this help us? Maybe that's what 2022 has felt like for you, though. And so maybe this is helpful.

[8 : 57] And maybe what the disciples worry about privately in their little group, we actually worry about too. I think, and we won't go through the whole of Mark chapter 13 today, but I think a big clue on how we, as brothers and sisters, should respond to this passage is the command that repeatedly came up over and over again. What was the command? Anyone want to have a stab? Did you notice it?

Watch out, right? Be on your guard, whatever your translation says. Did you see that in verse 9? Be on your guard. Verse 22. So be on your guard. All right? Verse 33. Be on guard. Be alert.

And after that final story about the master and his doorkeepers again, he says, therefore keep watch. Watch out. It's tempting to get caught up in trying to solve every mystery in this chapter. That's not my role for you today. Whatever the symbolism means here exactly, we know for sure, though, that the Lord tells this because he wants something practical from his disciples. He wants them to keep watch and watch out. So as we sit with Jesus at the Mount of Olives, let's think practical when it comes to Mark chapter 13. Are you worried this Easter? Keep watch, says the

Lord Jesus. And to his worried disciples and to us, I think he warns us about at least three things, and that's what I want to share today. So firstly, I think he warns us from the first few verses, okay, to watch out that we're not dependent on external things for security. I'll tell that again. I think this Easter, watch out that you're not dependent on external things for security.

What's happened in Mark's gospel so far? Some of you may have read this before. Some of you may have not. It might help to get our bearings, our kind of days of the week in order. Okay? All right? So Sunday, Palm Sunday, Jesus rides into Jerusalem as the humble king. And then the day after Sunday is Monday, right? Monday, he strides into the temple, okay? And Mark chapter 11 tells us he clears it out, right? He's furious with all those people, the money changers. Those have turned God's holy place into a place of commerce. And then on Tuesday, he actually heads in again, right, to the temple, and he's starting to teach the crowds. And then actually it stirs up big debates, right? The Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Herodias, they all come and they try and win him over and basically show that he has no authority to teach. But no one can challenge him. They are all shut down in their arguments.

[11 : 31] Jesus clearly teaches with God's authority. And he's clearly trying to say, this temple building, right, that I'm teaching in, this is my house of prayer, not your house's, all these other religious leaders. And so that's exactly what has happened just before chapter 13. And so verse 1, as he was leaving the temple, one of his disciples said to him, look teacher, what massive stones, what magnificent buildings. It's like they've just toured the White House, okay, these disciples, and they've just seen their leader do a good job as being president, okay? That's what's going on here, right? They've just walked out. Jesus, their leader, has just done an amazing job. And so these disciples are feeling pretty confident, right? Teacher, look at this place. Looks great, doesn't it? This can be our future headquarters, you know? Let's set up shop here. You're our leader, you just smashed it.

Surely you are the one who will make Judea great again. That's probably what's going through the disciples' minds at this point. But Jesus, verse 2, replies, right? You see these buildings? Every stone will be smashed to the ground. Not one will be left on another. Imagine how you'd feel if you just got told that by your leader, your teacher. I imagine the walk across from Jerusalem to the Mount of Olives. Must have been pretty silent, right? Twelve guys had put aside their careers for this amazing moment to see their leader kind of start to take over. They're just told that it would all crumble away. In verse 4, it says here, 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're all about to be fulfilled? I'll give you a tip when you read your Bibles. When you see a character ask a question, it's actually a good thing to do to ask, why are they asking that question? Right? If we want to understand this narrative, we want to ask, what made Peter, James, John, and Andrew take the time to ask Jesus, feel like they have to ask him, tell us, when will this temple be destroyed? What will be the signs?

And I want to suggest that their question here is betraying that they have an anxious heart. They have some worries. I think they're worried about what life would look like without a temple.

After all, for them, this temple, it was called Herod's Temple, had been around their whole life. As if this building, if you'd grown up in this building, this building, PCBC's building, had been around your whole life. You couldn't imagine life without it. That's how they felt.

[14 : 23] Every brick was a reminder that God had not forgotten his people. That's how they would have thought and assumed. But after Jesus' warning, everything's going to shatter to the ground.

These disciples are probably shocked. Hang on. When's this going to happen? Can we possibly keep going as God's people if there's no building? Come on, Jesus.

You see, behind their question, they are worried. They are worried for their security as God's people. And look, by forecasting, this is Jesus, you know, when he speaks, he's predicting the future.

By forecasting that one day the temple will be destroyed, he's not just saying that this is, I'm predicting something that does come true. It does. 70 AD, this Herod's Temple no longer exists. It's destroyed by the Romans. But the Lord is, I think, also warning them, don't depend on brick and stone for your security.

[15 : 25] You see, what Easter weekend is going to remind the disciples is that you do not need a nice, flash, shiny building to have a mighty God among you, to see God's power.

Because the cross and the empty tomb, as we just sung about, that will be far more dazzling than bricks and stones. That will provide far surer hope that Jesus is King.

That will transform lives, what happens on Easter. And so I don't know what about you, whatever you're anxious about this Easter yourself. Maybe you're worried about uni assignments or you're worried about relationships.

Will others be proud of what I've achieved this year? Am I close enough to getting my dream job? Will I get that house or that vacation? Or fill in the blank, okay?

So if I ask you, okay, when you're stressed, what do you like to do? Okay. When you're worried, what do you tend to do?

[16:34] Jesus would say, be careful. Watch out. Don't look to external things for the security that you need. Who knows?

Like Job, one day you might lose everything you treasure. Like Joseph, one day your brothers might betray you. And look, PCBC English, if we are ever tempted to humble brag, look, teacher, what a magnificent thing we've got here at Tirako Drive.

What amazing worship we can have together, so free and so welcoming. Let's watch out, too.

Because any of that could crumble. But if our hope is not in stuff, not in a particular ministry, not in a building, an institution, if our hope is in Jesus, then that's a hope that cannot crumble.

It cannot be destroyed. Can't be unplugged. Will never be shut down. So spiritual danger, one, for this Easter, let's watch out. Let's not rely on external things for our security.

Let's move on to the next point. Watch that you're not deceived by false teachers. Let's have a look at verse 5 and 6 again. Jesus continues, right? Jesus says to them, Watch out that no one deceives you.

[17:51] Many will come in my name, claiming I am he, and will deceive many. So on the one hand, the disciples, they didn't need to know every little detail of their future. And yet Jesus is kind, and he does open up a window, right?

And warn them of things that will happen in their lives. And one of the things is this. Many will come in Jesus' name to deceive. Jesus even tells the disciples further down, verse 22, for false Christs and false prophets will appear.

They'll even perform signs and miracles to deceive the elect if that were possible. In 2,000 years on, Easter 2022, that is no different. Friends, in the next two weeks, your news feeds will be flooded with invitations to big, beautiful things from people who sound like they're Christians.

Maybe you'll be invited to discover a deeper and truer meaning of the Bible. Maybe you'll be asked to join and listen to some anointed celebrity speaker.

And yet Jesus says, watch out. Don't be deceived. Some of them, not all of them, but some of them, may lead you astray.

[19:14] I say this in love. You know, it's so heartbreaking each time I hear someone describe how someone they love has been caught in a web false teaching or they've been sucked into a cult.

It's so heartbreaking when they feel like they have no way out and no way to help. How can, friends, you tell a false teacher this Easter? I don't know.

Sometimes it feels like it's as hard as finding the Easter bunny. But let me share at least three things to look out for. One is this. Look at their sources.

Look at their sources. I mean, think about it. Just before this mountaintop chat in Mark 13 and Mark 12, Jesus calls out the Sadducees. Okay? The Sadducees, they were trying to trap him in a debate about the marriage and resurrection and Jesus is smart enough and he says, aren't you in error because you don't know the scriptures or the power of God?

That's Mark 12, 24. Okay? So let's take Jesus' approach. This Easter, whatever you watch, whatever you listen to, whatever conferences or events that you click into, look at their source.

[20:30] Do they interpret scripture with scripture? Or are they kind of quoting certain authorities more than the Bible? Do they seem like they're selective in what they preach about?

Do they focus only on maybe one part of a passage, one book in the Bible? Are they only speaking about certain truths from the Bible and not others? Friends, Jesus calls us to watch out, to check that God's word does not just fall away or get sidelined under an experience or a tradition or just reason that is so locked in that it cannot be argued away with.

So one, look at their sources. Two, and I think this is important, look at their Jesus. every false religion and every false cult does something different with Jesus.

And so look at their Jesus. Even if a false teacher's aim is to come in Jesus' name, right, they will literally say, yeah, I am he sometimes. Okay, that's pretty obvious. Okay, look, you are not Jesus. You are not a brown-skinned Middle Eastern man. I don't believe you. But look, but others will be more, they might be more subtle, but they might say, I have the spirit of Jesus.

[21 : 57] I come in the name of Jesus. Or really, the way they talk and act, they want you to trust them like Jesus, like the promised one.

So whether it is members of Shin Chonji or other cults who spin big stories about their founders how amazing they are, how much they have the spirit of Jesus in them.

Whether it's more subtle, like books and songs and teaching, they give us a different Jesus, one that is made in our image rather than God's image. But you need to be careful.

Look at their Jesus. If their Jesus sounds too much like you and me, maybe there's a chance it's not Jesus. 2 Peter 1, chapter 1, verse 3, he reminds us everything we need for life and godliness can be found through our knowledge of Jesus.

The faithful teacher will put Jesus front and center. The false teacher, well, they might mention Jesus, but he's at the margins. I chatted with some guy on the bus yesterday and I asked him, do you believe in Jesus?

[23 : 06] He said, yes, but, and then he added this and this and this and this and this that was important for them. When you hear a Bible teacher and Jesus Christ is not magnified in their message, then watch out.

Don't be deceived. So look at their Jesus. Thirdly, look at their life. Look at their life. And this is hard because it exposes every one of us who teach or lead, right?

But time after time, the Bible warns us never to focus only on outward appearances. Sure, a teacher may sound impressive. They may crack lots of good jokes.

They may say beautiful prayers. But what are they like when they're not on stage? What are they like when it's just their family around them, when no one else is around them?

These are the questions to ask. By God's grace, we've just elected new leaders for our church. And remember, when the Bible gives instructions, what makes a good leader in the church?

[24 : 13] 1 Timothy 3 reminds us the focus is almost exclusively on character and conduct. It's not a big, long list of job requirements or skill sets.

It's actually mainly a list of character requirements. And so, friends, you and I have a responsibility to care if teachers and leaders act inappropriately.

You should point out, you should raise it if our home lives are in a mess, if we tend to be argumentative and divisive. Look at their life.

And this is hard because in social media land, it's easy to hide and present your best self. and we live in a celebrity obsessed culture. We're always looking for heroes of renown if we want to use Barry's words last week.

We're always looking for big people to get behind. But I want to suggest to you far better to follow a crucified saviour and those who imitate him than to follow a charismatic personality, a hero who later deceives you.

[25 : 21] So don't be deceived by false teachers. Look at their sources. Look at their Jesus. Look at their life. That's the second spiritual danger I want to raise with you.

Let's have a look then at the next two verses. And this is our third point. I think we want to watch out that we're not distracted by the global turmoil around us, by all the hurt around us in this world.

And Jesus continues, when you hear of wars and rumours of wars, don't be alarmed. Such things must happen but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains. I don't know about you but I find it hard to process just how much death and destruction is going on, how much division and unrest has been hitting our world right now.

you and I feel sorrow for places we've never been. We are heartbroken for people just like us that we've never met. And in the rest of this chapter from this verse onwards Jesus kind of unloads and explains to his followers that they will have this kind of anxiety because they will have things that will get worse in their lives.

[26 : 41] And yet he says to them don't be alarmed. Right? Verse 9 don't be alarmed. And I think one reason Jesus tells us of what's to come in the rest of the chapter is that he doesn't want them to lose focus on something more important that we can forget when we are anxious and worried.

What's that? Verse 10 reminds us because look, even if we are handed over to the local councils, even if we have to witness before people who are hostile to us, verse 10 says the gospel must first be preached to all nations.

The gospel must first be preached to all nations. Whatever this chapter is about and how they'll be fulfilled, the gospel must first be preached to all nations.

And I think that the other thing he says that's key is at the end of the chapter, right, verse 32, he tells us no one knows about the day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the sun, but only the Father.

He's talking about when will everything take place? Actually, even Jesus does not know at that point. Only the Father knows. And so I think if we, PCBC English, if we were sitting with Jesus on the Mount of Olives on Easter Tuesday, I think he would say the same to us.

[28 : 09] Hey, stop worrying. There's so much bad news around you. Be on your guard. Yes, expect opposition, but you won't know everything up front.

Only the Father does. But what's the important thing? The gospel must first be preached to all nations. A friend of mine and a former missionary, Derek Brotherson, he put it this way, the world needs many things right now, including doctors and nurses and musicians and so on.

What the world needs more than anything else, though, is to know about God's plan to bless through Jesus. Now is a time of great suffering around our world, but it's also a time of great opportunity.

Do we believe this, PCBC English? that perhaps this Easter, more than ever, people are looking for hope? Yes, there is war.

Yes, there is a live outbreak, and this is more risky than usual. Yes, things may get worse, but don't let that distract us, friends. Keep bringing the grace and love of Jesus into your house.

[29 : 27] Spread that. Be viral with that instead. Bring the love and grace of Jesus to your parents, to your grandparents. They need it so much. How about your classmates, your co-workers?

Make the most of opportunities this Easter, this coming week, to answer their questions of gospel hope, to put a stone in their shoe so that they will consider Christ. Perhaps learn about an unreached people group.

Partner with what God is working there. Pray for them, those who have no opportunity to even hear about Easter this Easter. Because why does God allow earthquakes and pandemics and other earth-shattering events?

Maybe it is to turn us back to a kingdom that cannot be shaken. That's what the writer of Hebrews says. Why are we so innately outraged, offended by the abuse and torture and murder of innocent people in Ukraine?

maybe you and I are built to long for justice that only a prince of peace like Jesus can bring. And he will, right?

[30 : 37] Verse 26 in this chapter, he says, at that time, one day soon, people will see the Son of Man coming in cloud of great power and glory. Brothers and sisters, we worry this Easter.

this world is in turmoil this Easter. But watch out. Don't get caught up. Don't get distracted. We have a mission from our captain.

The gospel must be preached to all nations. And look, whatever your worries this Easter, that is one thing you can ask, right?

These three questions. Have you drifted towards things gradually that cannot secure you, that cannot satisfy you? Or are you letting your guard down over who you listen to, what music you are taking in, what teachers your podcast subscribe to?

Keep watch. And are you distracted this Easter? Is all the doom and gloom in the world distracting you from the mission of the church?

[31 : 45] Keep watch. I don't know about you, but if you're one of the disciples, maybe you might even feel sorry for them right now. They're sitting there and Jesus is just unloaded on them a whole chapter that just seems really, really harsh or confusing or both.

Being told things will get worse, that their home will be besieged and they will be persecuted and so on. Look, and yet Easter week gives us the right context for how to read this, right?

Easter week reminds us that Jesus knows these warnings himself. Easter week reminds us that Jesus has and will experience all these same struggles that he warns the disciples about.

The rest of this conversation, look, it may seem mysterious, but one thing that helps us make sense of what goes on in this chapter is if we connect it to Jesus' own life, his own experience. You see, when Jesus says, watch out for false teachers, he's just been arguing with them, hasn't he? Right? The Pharisees, the Sadducees, and so yes, be on guard when they try to draw you in too.

[32 : 59] When Jesus warns of a desecration, an abomination that's to come, whatever it is, he's already grieved a day before that his house of prayer was desecrated and turned into an abominable marketplace rather than a house of prayer.

So watch out that it never happens here at PCBC in our lives in the church. And when Jesus warns that family members will betray and rebel and hate you, these are words coming from someone who has heard his brothers and sisters reject him too.

So remember that. And he tells the disciples, look, remember this. And actually, a few days later, even his disciples will reject him and betray him and abandon him.

And so we take courage, we go to Jesus when that happens to us too. You see, PCBC, Jesus is not the kind of person who warns you stuff as if he's just doom scrolling from a distance, never drawing close.

Jesus, he knows our worries. He has lived and shared our griefs and our concerns. And he has pioneered the way, Hebrews 12 says, for his people.

[34 : 19] He has gone before us to the cross of Calvary. That's what we celebrate at Easter. In Mark 13 here, he is the teacher warning his followers. Two days later, on the same mountain, he is sweating drops of blood, praying in a garden, worrying about the one thing that matters most, the salvation of his people.

Pleading with the Father, taking the cup of wrath willingly. And just as he encourages his disciples, trust the Father's timing, he himself now, in the garden, trusts the Father's will.

And when our Lord Jesus, he hangs on a cross, some of this comes true too, in chapter 13. The sun goes dark, there is an earthquake, we sang about the veil being torn in two.

Our Lord is forsaken because he bears our sins. And yet in his most anxious moment, in his agony, he fixes his eyes on heaven, he stays on task, he wins our salvation.

Hallelujah. What a savior. And so brothers and sisters, this Easter we worry, but Jesus will come again in glory. So don't worry.

[35 : 42] As sure as summer follows spring, as sure as Easter Sunday follows Good Friday, Jesus will win, he will reign, we can keep trusting him.

So let's let go on things that will never save us. Let's keep guarding against anyone who drives Jesus away in their teaching. And let's not be distracted. Our world hurts, but Jesus heals.

And so we need to preach the gospel to all nations. Let's pray. In Christ alone, our hope is found. Lord, forgive us when we don't believe this, when our hope has been on our mortgages, on our education, on our careers, on people we love more than you.

But Jesus should be our cornerstone. So Father, help us to turn back to him this Easter. And help us to be willing to introduce Jesus Christ to our friends and family.

[36 : 55] Be excited that though things may get worse in our world. You know how it feels. You have felt the pressures. You sympathize with our weaknesses.

And at the cross, you bore our sin, so we do not ever need to suffer twice, because you suffered in our place.

So Father, remind us again that in Christ alone, in Jesus alone, is our hope. And that's where it can be found. We pray these things in his name.

Amen.